

sojourners

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Faith in Action for Social Justice

Lord, When Did We See You Addicted?

Churches respond to the opioid crisis, by Heidi Thompson

Everyone needs a place to heal, by Kate Willette



PLUS:

Advent in a time of trial

Business and the common good

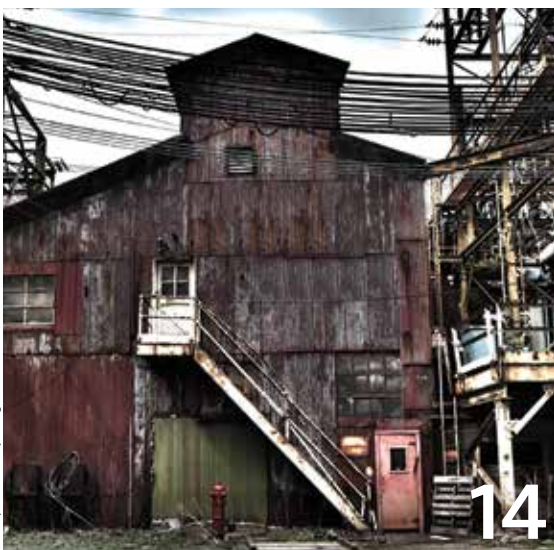
An experiment in neighborly love





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DURING THE HOLIDAYS, many of us go home. But home can be a tricky place these days. Pass the coffee and the pumpkin pie, but could we please skip the conversations with relatives who disagree with us about immigration, racism, climate change, and, well, pretty much everything?

Nope, says Katharine M. Preston in “An Experiment in Neighborly Love.” In a time of intense polarization, “talking exclusively with those with whom we agree simply hardens our positions and makes us angrier,” she writes in this issue. Instead, she challenges us to an “experiment”: gathering people with a wide range of ideological views to listen to one another. Some may see this practice as “hopelessly passive, naïve, and a waste of time,” she admits, but building empathy across the partisan divide could go a long way toward ending the cycle of alienation and frustration that makes people susceptible to fear-based rhetoric.

Our cover story offers another kind of homegoing. In “Lord, When Did We See You Addicted?” Heidi Thompson returns to where she was raised—Trumbull County, Ohio—to report on how churches are responding to the public health emergency that killed more people last year than HIV/AIDS at its peak: the opioid epidemic. Churches across the theological spectrum—Catholic, mainline, nondenominational—offer whatever they can to help relieve the suffering of a community reeling from addiction. Yet there’s a spiritual dimension to the crisis that’s more difficult to treat: “That’s the part of this a lot of people don’t understand,” Pastor Julia Wike explains. “There’s an oppression here, a sense of hopelessness.”

In times like these, we remember the



Advent promise of John’s gospel: “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.” So this season, we lament and grieve—and not just for the lives destroyed by opioid addiction, but for the myriad ways we have failed to love our neighbors. At the same time, we remain stubbornly committed to finding

glimmers of hope. We found one such story in the mission of Recovery Café (“Everyone Needs a Place to Heal”), an initiative that began when Killian Noe realized that many folks in recovery lacked the support networks typically offered by a family or faith community. By offering a supportive circle of friends and a job to do, the café offers a place to heal. It’s a story of being loved and needed—a story of home. ■

Letters

Do No Harm

“Clash of Liberties” by Oliver Thomas (Sept.-Oct. 2017) is a great, thought-provoking article. I am a liberal Democrat and support most all liberal causes—especially the right of same-sex couples to live their lives like any non-same-sex couple. I also support the right for anyone to disagree with me, so long as that disagreement does not do harm to others. I am a member of the one race on this earth—the human race—and love all my brothers and sisters equally (although sometimes reluctantly).

Robert M. Crouch
Waynesboro, Virginia

Grounds for Complaint

In reference to your Sept.-Oct. 2017 interview with Charles C. Haynes, titled “At Play in the Fields of Church and State” (by Betsy Shirley), I feel that it must be pointed out that a key aspect of the Supreme Court’s *Trinity Lutheran Church v. Comer* decision is omitted. As certain as I am that the intention of both your interviewer and Haynes are good, the failure to acknowledge that

Our church would not permit women to attend seminaries or become deacons.

the funding in the case was specifically for school playgrounds changes the entire tenor of the case, leading to the impression in the interview that the church secured funding to improve their own playground instead of the school’s playground. The issue is much more complicated than the interview with Haynes makes it sound, and I would refer everyone to the court’s opinion on its website.

Joseph Maurici
Rochester, New York

Cutting Ties

Ruth Everhart’s article “Skin in the Game” in the August 2017 issue helped me with a difficult decision. For years, I hung in with the church of my roots where three generations of my family were christened, married, and died. As a child, I witnessed behaviors by some clergy that I now know were

grievous sins. As an adult, I listened to a pastor who told us 9/11 was God’s punishment for homosexuals and women who had abortions. When I questioned at a meeting why our church would not permit women to attend seminaries or become deacons, I was snubbed by the congregation. Feeling that I was in a spiritual crisis, I sent a heartfelt letter to our bishop, our spiritual leader, but received no reply. Still, I remained tied to my church, albeit by a thin thread. Thank you, Pastor Everhart, for helping me to finally cut that thread and pursue a church that is more godly.

Lois Halley
Westminster, Maryland

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Relief, development and peace in the name of Christ

BY JIM WALLIS

A Prayer for the Soul of the Nation



OVER THE PAST several months, Republicans in Congress tried time after time to make good on their seven-year threat to “repeal and replace” the Affordable Care Act. Each time a wide variety of groups stepped up to protect the vulnerable and ensure that millions of Americans continue to receive the health care they deserve. At several critical junctures, Christians played an important role.

This summer, for instance, a clear witness against health-care repeal was brought together by the Circle of Protection, a coalition of Christians we help convene who have come together around the biblical mandate to protect poor and vulnerable people. All the families of our faith—the National Association of Evangelicals and the National

doing here?” “Well, we’re praying for this vote, and we’re praying for you. Would you like to join our circle, and have us pray for you right now?” And 12 senators, both Democrats and Republicans, came into our circle.

We stood outside the Senate gallery door, with heads bowed, eyes closed, our hands on the shoulders of a senator or each other. And we said, “Lord, we are praying for the sick today, those who you care so much about, those whom you’ve asked us to protect. You said how we treat them is how we treat you, Lord. We pray for them in their fear and vulnerability right now, in what they’re afraid is going to happen to their kids, their disabled relatives, their older moms and dads. They’re afraid of how their families are going to be devastated by such a bill. We pray for the members of this important political place, that they would think beyond partisan politics. And that those who claim to be people of faith would look to you, and ask, ‘What does God want us to do? If Jesus were here, who would he want us to protect?’”

The prayer was for the poor, and for the soul of the nation. There was no reference to Democrats or Republicans—this wasn’t a partisan moment. This was a prayerful moment, with senators from both sides of the aisle.

After we prayed, one of the senators, Sherrod Brown from Ohio, said, “Could I share a scripture? I’ve been reading in Matthew 25 where Jesus said, ‘How you treat the sick is how you treat me.’ This isn’t about politics; this is about how we treat Christ himself. Isn’t that what the text is saying?”

Indeed, Matthew 25 tells us that the way we treat the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the stranger, and the prisoner is how we treat Christ himself. There is no more fundamental Christian teaching. The reason so many Christians

with diverse theological views could stand united against efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act is that the repeal bills would be harmful to the poor and sick.

As we look ahead, it’s likely that we may have to defend health care for vulnerable people yet again. But the political battles of 2017 also give us perspective on *why* health care is such a fundamental and potent issue in our society and politics, as well as offering a vision of what health care could and should look like in the future. Our obligation to defend the “least of these,” as laid out in Matthew 25, resonates so deeply regarding the sick because we *all* get sick sooner or later. And so we fight for a health-care system in which hundreds of millions of our fellow Americans are there to pick us up when we fall down—because, at some point, we all fall down.

JESUS’ SECOND commandment (Matthew 22:39) is also our guide here: We want affordable, quality health care for everyone in our society because we believe in loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. And just as we believe in racial justice and environmental justice, so too we believe in health-care justice, because all human beings are made in the image of God and loved by God.

There are different ways for a nation to organize and manage its health-care system. But there should be no confusion for Christians about the goal we seek: a system that is just, where health care is a right and not a privilege, and where every single person can access and afford quality care. As we continue to defend the most vulnerable from attempts to pull our society in the opposite direction, we should always keep our eye on this prize. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

Just as we believe in racial justice and environmental justice, so too we believe in health-care justice.

Council of Churches, the Catholic Church and the Salvation Army, and most of our denominations—came together to say: We may differ on many things, but we are joining to protect the people Christ has called us to protect. The group urged political leaders to pursue “options that do not ask our poorest neighbors to bear most of the weight of budget and health-care cuts.”

Back in July, on the very day a repeal vote was scheduled, about 20 of us showed up outside the Senate chamber door in response to a request from a senator. We were from many different traditions and denominations—Catholic, evangelical, Protestant, black churches, Latino churches—and we started praying outside the door.

Senators walked by on their way to vote. They said, “What are you



Hasina, a Rohingya refugee, worries over her 11-month-old son, who has acute pneumonia, at a Doctors Without Borders clinic in Bangladesh, near the Myanmar border.

Paula Bronstein/Getty Images

By Renita J. Weems

His Name Will Tell His Character

Advent in a time of trial.

ONE OF THE MOST familiar biblical passages to be read during Advent is from Isaiah 9:6: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

At the time it was spoken, the whole world was falling apart, or so it seemed to the eighth-century prophet Isaiah. Looking over history at a string of failed rulers, and staring into the abyss at ongoing chaos and political disaster, Isaiah looked forward to a time when God would send an heir to the throne who would be a different kind of ruler, a divinely appointed one (the Messiah), and his name would tell his character. Isaiah promised a people whose hope was failing that a baby would be born.

But where do babies come from? They come from women, women who endure the discomforts of pregnancy and the

excruciating pain of labor to bring forth life. Except for in the most tragic circumstances, the joy of birth comes after the culmination of many months of sacrifice and uncertainty by the mother in pregnancy and is her just due for hours or days of the agony and uncertainty of labor.

No wonder childbirth is a common trope in scripture for political crisis and uncertainty. Childbirth (and pregnancy)

Labor is a moral act.

spotlight a mother’s sacrifice, discomfort, suffering, and the unknown outcome of her labor. Divine deliverance will come, but not without near-unbearable periods of turmoil, disaster, uproar, and darkness.

Advent arrives this year like it does every year, I suppose. Upheaval and turbulence everywhere. We are in unpredictable waters and uncharted territory. A scan of our

newsfeeds vindicates our anxiety. It’s nothing but a tapestry of greedy corporate deals, shady political compromises, and a frenzy of unanswered questions about who colluded with whom, about what, and who knew about it when. Couple that with headlines about widespread death and destruction by humans against each other (mass killings, police abuse, warmongering) and scenes of nature hammering the earth (hurricanes, floods, fires, earthquakes).

Perhaps it’s true that there’s nothing new under the sun; perhaps this is not the first time in history that Advent comes at a time when nothing feels normal. But for those of us who’ve been on earth for less than a century, this feels different. What does the future hold?

The Bible’s poets recognized that giving birth and undergoing political crisis are both existential human events. A threshold is crossed into either life or death. Later in

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The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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Isaiah, King Hezekiah calls up the image of a woman on the verge of dying in labor to capture the hopeless exhaustion felt by the people in the face of the Assyrian crisis at hand: "This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the moment of birth and there is no strength to deliver them" (37:3).

When the laboring mother gives up and loses hope, the baby has almost no chance. The mother must keep going. Keep hoping.

Our prayer this Advent is that we not give in to despair. Do not lose hope. The Messiah comes. But not without help on

our part as a nation. Pregnancy is not just waiting but real work. Labor is a moral act. It requires pushing, yelling, sweating, focusing, bearing down on everyone's part. Advent is not passive waiting, but is a moral act of anticipation that will require collective acts of holding on and bearing down to bring about the change we want to see. The Messiah comes. But not without our help. ■

Renita J. Weems is an ordained minister, biblical scholar, and author who lives in Nashville, Tenn.

By Damon T. Berry

Is Christianity a Problem for White Nationalists?

If it isn't, it should be.

CERTAIN FORMS OF Christianity have long shared space with the political and nationalist Right in the United States. The history of white racist religion in the U.S. has also followed the line of a nativist ideology informed by a certain understanding of U.S. Protestant Christianity.

In the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan sought to preserve Anglo-Protestant supremacy in the U.S.—especially in the face of immigrants from outside Western Europe. Later arose a particular form of racist ideology known as the "Christian Identity" movement, influential in racist organizations into the 1990s.

More recently, racialized Christian mythologies are no longer the dominant ideologies motivating white supremacists. Why has Christianity become problematic for white nationalists?

My own research reveals that Christianity is a problem for many American white nationalists because it is regarded by them as an ideology that weakens the allegedly natural instincts for racial preservation. The main objections to Christianity from contemporary white nationalists have been that 1) Christianity is of Jewish origins, and 2) that Christianity teaches, ultimately, values such as universal brotherhood of all people and

the responsibility for everyone to care for one another. These are values that white nationalists have labeled "socialism" and ultimately alien to white racial nationalism.

I'm not a person of faith, but I want to offer some observations about why Christianity *should* be problematic to white nationalists and how it might become more so.

Christians have not always been on the side of "universal brotherhood" (or sisterhood). White nationalists are wrong when they assert that this has been the case. For example, Christians were involved in King Leopold II's vicious campaign in the Congo in the late 19th century, even in

excusing the exploitation of the people there by arguing that they were being converted. Such justifications existed, too, in the U.S. as Indigenous people were murdered and their children forced into "de-Indianization" projects, largely led by Christian organizations. And of course, on slavery, Southern Christians used selective readings of the Bible to justify brutality in the pursuit of profit.

These are facts. But only some Christian organizations have moved to address them. The Southern Baptist Convention, for example, took a contentious vote in June to

The Klan sought to preserve Anglo-Protestant supremacy.

From the Archives

December 1986

Advent Promises

THESE ARE fear-provoking and immobilizing times for many who have labored over the years for a more just society and world. Their arms have indeed grown weary, and their knees totter and shake in the face of the present hour. The Bible is unequivocal in its contention that a frightened and trembling people are unable to act and faithfully stand in their hour of trial. Fear saps their strength and leaves them cowering in a corner ...

Isaiah prophesied to a similarly dispirited and broken people. Judah appeared doomed and its future nonexistent. The people were not only anxious about tomorrow but uncertain that they would survive the day. They had lost sight of, and faith in, the promises of God, since all that their eyes could see was desolation and ruin. The prophet challenged them to be strong and to take courage, undergirding one another as they look to the salvation of the Lord. ...

This God brings justice to the oppressed, feeds the hungry, sets the prisoner free, restores sight to the blind, loves the righteous, takes care of the stranger, gives heart to the orphan and widow, and unseats the wicked from their thrones. This same God, who liberates the people from ancient oppressions in Egypt and makes "a way out of no way" for those in exile, has promised to come to us if we wait with patience. ■

Calvin S. Morris was an associate professor of pastoral theology at Howard University Divinity School in Washington, D.C., when this article appeared.



condemn the "alt-right" and white supremacy. But when Dwight McKissic, senior pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas, brought the original resolution, it met resistance. McKissic told *The Atlantic* that he felt it was "a mystery how you can so easily affirm standard beliefs about other things, but we get to white supremacy ... and all of a sudden, we've got a problem here." Though a similar resolution eventually passed, the church indeed has a problem.

White nationalism, especially when unacknowledged, is a problem for Christians trying to address racial injustice in their own communities because of the normalcy of white supremacist attitudes within the church itself.

Traditions are not static things awaiting passive expression. Christian organizations and institutions, local churches, and individual believers are not restricted to simply performing whatever their traditions teach. They are also responsible for shaping those teachings, especially on issues of social import. Traditions are living things

that express the collective will of their participants.

What can Christians do to make Christianity more of a problem for white nationalism? Make your tradition anathema to white supremacy. As William Barber II said recently, referencing Martin Luther King, "Silence is not an option."

Neither is inaction. Make your gathering spaces places of refuge for targeted communities. Make your institutions reflect the multiracial and multicultural reality of the global church. Your members should, in very specific and unambiguous ways, embrace universal fraternity and concern for all people.

This Christianity would be a problem for white nationalists, not only because of who they are, but because of who you, as Christians, have become. ■

Damon T. Berry, author of Blood and Faith: Christianity in American White Nationalism, is assistant professor of religion at St. Lawrence University in Canton, N.Y.

By Patrick Cunningham

On a Knife's Edge

North Korea's nuclear threats seem insane, but we ignore the broader context at our peril.

NORTH KOREA'S hydrogen bomb test in September came as no shock to observers in South Korea. It was timed to protest the annual joint U.S.-South Korea military exercises. These "war games" are viewed by North Korea as a deadly provocation and as preparation for invasion and regime change.

The saber rattling and war of words by the U.S. and North Korean administrations reached a dangerous level this fall when President Trump, in his address to the U.N. General Assembly, threatened to "totally destroy" North Korea. To use such bellicose rhetoric at a forum that seeks political solutions to the world's problems was particularly grave and reprehensible. It flies in the face of Christian values as well as the principles of universal human rights on which the U.N. is founded.

In September, U.S. planes crossed the demarcation that separates North and South Korea in the East Sea. In response, North

Korea's foreign minister, Ri Yong-ho, issued counterthreats to shoot down U.S. strategic bombers. Ri's remarks betray North Korea's fears of a pre-emptive strike by the U.S. and the "decapitation" of North Korea's leadership. Since then the situation has gotten worse.

The U.S. press rarely sets U.S.-North Korea relations in a historical context. In the 1950s, U.S. forces visited utter devastation on North Korea during the Korean War. Nearly 5 million people were killed and thousands of towns laid to waste under systematic carpet bombing.

The Korean Catholic bishops wrote recently, "North Korea's nuclear test is clearly a violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions. It is also an act of threat to peace in Northeast Asia, inciting the neighboring countries of Korea to nuclear armament."

North Korea, however, was the first

to propose a “freeze for freeze” solution, whereby it would suspend its nuclear program in exchange for a U.S. cancellation or reduction of large-scale joint military drills with South Korea. Civil society, including a broad base of church support, has constantly endorsed this strategy as the only means through which negotiations can occur and a viable political solution be achieved.

The U.S. policy of insisting that North Korea suspend its nuclear program as a *precondition* for dialogue has gotten us nowhere. Numerous sanctions imposed on North Korea over the years have emboldened North Korea’s leadership in inflicting hardship on its people with its “military first” policy and its quest to develop its nuclear program. The Korean Catholic bishops refer to the spread of nuclear armaments by anyone as an “act of evil” and condemn the arms race that has enveloped the Korean peninsula and wider regions to the detriment of human welfare.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in has fallen in step with the U.S. in supporting sanctions against North Korea, while striving to keep open a window for dialogue. However, recently President Moon has joined the U.S. in increasingly hard-line policies, including acquiescing to U.S. demands to beef up South Korea’s defense through the highly controversial deployment of the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) missile defense system. The THAAD installation in Seongju was met with massive civilian resistance, which was violently suppressed by 8,000 police. Religious groups strongly condemned the government’s response. Many felt betrayed by Moon, who was brought to power in the “candlelight revolution” and had espoused nonviolence principals and called for diplomatic engagement with North Korea.

Any miscalculation or misinterpretation by either side could set off nuclear annihilation. If political parties are not able to meet this challenge, then civil society and religious groups must step in to put the region on a path toward a permanent Korea peace treaty. We are on a knife’s edge. ■

Patrick Cunningham, SSC, is justice and peace coordinator for the Missionary Society of St. Columban in South Korea.



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- **July 1:** Master of Religion and Public Life



EMORY

**CANDLER
SCHOOL OF
THEOLOGY**

VIDEO



J.P. Keenan

My God Is ...

When bad theology is used to justify everything from white nationalism to environmental degradation, we often find ourselves saying, "The God we worship isn't like that." So in a new video, we asked the staff of Sojourners to articulate who God is: "My God heals without worrying about insurance." "My God is not afraid to call out racism." "She breaks through stained glass ceilings." Who is your God? Watch the video at sojo.net/myGod.

QUOTED

“Hundreds of emails and calls from Christians all over the country came into the ICE director's office.”

—Alexia Salvatierra
on the effort to secure the release of
Noe Carias, a pastor with no criminal record who
was detained by ICE for two months

sojo.net/release

AUDIO



Black and Undocumented

“People will see me as a black person first before they see me as an immigrant, so I might as well tell my story if I'm already fighting two different systems,” said **Mwewa Sumbwe** (above). “The purpose of people coming out as undocumented is I want you to know my story, know that I exist, and acknowledge my existence.”

In a recent Sojourners audio story, associate web editor Dhanya Addanki talked with members of the UndocuBlack Network, a group that provides support for those who are often left out of the conversation about immigration: black undocumented people. Some of these members, such as Sumbwe, received work permits and protection against deportation through Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), a program Trump ended in September.

Like many DACA recipients, Sumbwe is now worried about her future in the U.S. Yet she told Sojourners that she was tired of being defined by her anxiety. “I feel like the media is always so quick to show the bad things or the suffering, the struggle of being undocumented, but doesn't want to show that undocumented people are *people*—we have fun, we have lives,” said Sumbwe. “Being undocumented is not a definition; that's not how I define myself, that's how someone else decided to identify me.”

Listen to the story at sojo.net/undocublack.

A background image featuring a mosaic of small, square tiles in various shades of beige, tan, and light brown, creating a textured, abstract pattern.

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Lord, When Did We See You Addicted?

Northeast Ohio, like much of the Rust Belt, has been ravaged by unemployment, hopelessness, and opioid addiction. Churches there are responding with help and hope • by HEIDI THOMPSON

OHIO'S OPIOID EPIDEMIC started a decade ago with the over-prescription of pain medicine and the arrival soon after of entrepreneurial heroin dealers. But in the Mahoning Valley, in Ohio's northeast corner, you can trace the start of this crisis back even further, to an autumn day 40 years ago.

On Black Monday, Sept. 19, 1977, Youngstown Sheet and Tube, one of the area's biggest steel mills, announced it was closing. The shutdown wasn't a total shock; the steel industry had been in trouble for years. More than 4,000 workers lost their jobs that day. The closure started a chain reaction of mill and related business closings, unemployment, neighborhood collapse, and population decline that reverberates even today.

The mill closing, and all the losses that came after, had the effect of dropping an economic bomb on the region, breaking apart families, driving young people out of the area, skyrocketing poverty, and increasing demands on health and safety-net services. Like other Ohio cities with a manufacturing base, Youngstown and Warren, the valley's largest cities, saw their jobs,

At left: A shuttered steel mill in Ohio, where Rust Belt communities have been ravaged by a failing economy and an opioid epidemic. At right: Pastor Julia Wike, during her nightly walks around Youngstown, provides food, counseling, and compassion to its forgotten residents.

businesses, and, finally, residents flee. My hometown of Warren lost a third of its population; Youngstown lost almost half.

The rubble left behind created ideal conditions for heroin's demons to move in and take over. And they have, with a vengeance.



The epidemic has brought an already-struggling post-industrial local economy to its knees.

Photos by Heidi Thompson

In Trumbull County (the more northern of the two counties that make up the Mahoning Valley), two to three people die from overdoses every week, according to county records. The rate of drug-related deaths has nearly tripled since 2013, not to mention the rise in addiction-related crime, such as burglary, robbery, and prostitution. During the first half of 2017, about 100 people a month were treated for drug overdoses by first responders and local emergency rooms.

The opioid epidemic, of course, is a national health crisis. In June, *The New York Times* reported that drug overdoses are now the leading cause of death among Americans under 50. In 2016, opioids caused more deaths in the U.S. than did HIV/AIDS at the peak of that epidemic in 1995.

Friday night sights

On Friday nights, Pastor Julia Wike takes her ministry to the streets.

During the day, she's a full-time social worker for the county; at night, she becomes simply "Pastor Julia." She usually stops first at a local fast-food restaurant and places an order for a few dozen hamburgers. Then she walks Warren's neighborhoods, looking

for the addicted and suffering. When she finds them, she offers a burger, a prayer, help—and hope.

"I just love on them, get them something to eat, and try to help them," she says. "God loves those that are broken, and an addict is a broken person."

She's been making these visits for nine years, trying to connect people with treatment and Jesus.

Out of those visits, she founded Basement Outreach Ministries, which meets weekly at Warren's First United Methodist Church and provides meals, clothing, and referrals to services.

She recalls a woman she found high and alone on a bare bed in an empty drug house. The woman was barely conscious, yet crying. "No one wants to be like that, sick and always looking for the one thing you think will make you feel better, but never does."

Pastor Julia sees and knows the faces of the area's troubling statistics. In a county with a population of 200,000, everyone knows



someone who has struggled or died from opioid addiction.

The situation has predictably strained the county's resources: The coroner's office is overwhelmed with cases. Burnout rates are high among police and counselors. While wait times for treatment have improved, there's still not enough space for everyone who wants it. In the last two years, the local children's services agency absorbed a 55 percent increase in the number of kids needing care because of neglect and abuse related to their parents' drug use. Grandparents are increasingly taking care of grandchildren because of parents who are in addiction, in treatment, in jail, or dead.

The epidemic has brought an already-struggling post-industrial local economy to its knees. Addiction is so widespread that employers have trouble finding job candidates who can pass drug tests. The area's limited public transportation makes ongoing treatment and support—which is essential for recovery—difficult for those without cars. And nearly every day another news item appears about an overdose-related car accident or unconscious addict found at home while young children play nearby. In April, county commissioners declared a state of emergency.

The Mahoning Valley's opioid epidemic is more than a public health crisis. It's a spiritual catastrophe.

"That's the part of this a lot of people don't understand," Pastor Julia says. "There's an oppression here, a sense of hopelessness."

Across the Mahoning Valley, Pastor Julia and other people of faith are confronting that hopelessness with action. Church people offer everything from meals and recovery housing to funeral services and grief counseling. They're starting prevention programs for youth, organizing awareness-raising rallies, and sitting with grieving parents.

"Many, many people are working very, very hard," says Pastor Julia.



Pastor Julia Wike in the hallway of God's Refuge House, a new residential ministry for women in recovery from drug addiction, while Basement Ministries Outreach member Mark Hillard patches new drywall.

**In April, county
commissioners
declared a state
of emergency.**



Mock funerals and too many real ones

Five years ago, Pastor Alton Merrell Sr. of New Jerusalem Fellowship heard from the mayor, who had been talking to the county coroner, that a crisis was brewing.

Merrell, whose predominantly African-American congregation is on Warren's

west side, was skeptical. Warren's black community had been coping with disproportionate levels of addiction, poverty, and criminal sentencing for years. The school-to-prison pipeline (often via a drug conviction) ran right through the city's west-side neighborhoods. Now, because young white people were dying, drugs were a problem?

"The clinics, the programs ... now things are happening," he says, referencing the increase in treatment centers. (For-profit treatment centers have flocked to the area, seeing a business opportunity amid the crisis.) "There's a feeling that none of this was serious until it moved to the suburbs."

That's not to say Pastor Merrell's congregation has been spared. He's done his share of funerals, sometimes not knowing for sure, but suspecting, that the deceased had overdosed on drugs. Shame is a powerful thing, and many families don't want to talk about addiction, he explains, especially in the early, raw days of grief after a young person has died.

Merrell has counseled parents worried about drug-using sons and daughters, prayed with members struggling with recovery, and organized other pastors to address the problem. He's preached on it from the pulpit, and when it looked like Medicaid funds might be slashed last spring as part of the U.S. House and Senate Republicans' efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act, he offered his church for a "mock funeral," complete with a hearse in the parking lot, to drive home the point that eliminating Medicaid-funded drug treatment would cost lives. (About 80 percent of those who receive treatment in the county can afford to do so because of Medicaid coverage.)

The crisis, he says, must be fought from all sides. This summer, he started a prevention effort aimed at high schoolers. The Academy meets afternoons, three days a week. Trained church volunteers, many of whom are experienced educators and counselors who were once at-risk youth themselves, work with young people in trouble with juvenile court or facing school suspensions, often related to drugs. "Kids don't know what they don't know," he explains. "We have to work as hard on prevention as we do on the cure."

People of every age, race, and income level in the

valley struggle with opioid addiction. The largest numbers are young adults who, instead of starting careers and families, are losing everything.

No magic shield

"No job, no future, no hope," says Trumbull County coroner Humphrey Germaniuk, when asked why he thinks heroin and its synthetic cousins fentanyl and carfentanyl are claiming the lives of so many of the area's young adults.

He wonders if the lack of opportunity leads to a sense of isolation and despair that feeds the epidemic.

As the only forensic pathologist in the county, Germaniuk has been sounding the alarm since 2004, when he first noticed the uptick in opioid-related cases. In Trumbull County, overdose deaths have increased every year since 2012, nearly tripling from 39 in 2013 to 106 in 2016. And the numbers are on pace to rise again for 2017. "If the homicide rate was as high as the overdose rate, we'd have the National Guard marching the streets," he says.

"We used to be a very strong, blue-collar, manufacturing community," he explains. Education and skills would help, he thinks, but that only works if you can find a job that pays a decent, livable wage. And with a local unemployment rate that hovers between 6 and 9 percent, significantly above the national average, finding a job that pays a family-supporting salary is a challenge.

Having a job isn't a magic shield of protection from addiction, as Dominic Mararri will tell you. Now in recovery himself and serving as the public relations director of the faith-based Warren Family Mission, Mararri's own story of addiction, which he'd struggled with since he was 15, took an awful turn after a work injury and a regimen of Percocet.

The Mahoning Valley's opioid epidemic is more than a public health crisis. It's a spiritual catastrophe.



A flyer promoting local awareness of addiction and care.

"The house is burning down. We don't have time to argue over terms."

Pastor Alton Merrell Sr. leads a mock funeral to protest proposed cuts to Medicaid. About 80 percent of those who receive treatment for opioid addiction in Trumbull County are covered by Medicaid.

"I was working in construction, beating my body up ... the doctor gave me a prescription and it just spiraled out of control. I don't blame the doc," he says. "My whole life was a void I was trying to fill. When I took those pills, I could have some temporary happiness, but it was like a monster that you couldn't beat back. It was never enough. At some point, even the pills didn't get me high. I couldn't sleep or eat."

Facing two to eight years in prison, Mararri's breakthrough came with a chance to get treatment out of the area and away from the friends, places, and habits that reinforced his addiction. Warren Family

Mission helped him get to a faith-based recovery program for young people in Michigan, where he stayed for three years.

Today he's back in the area and in leadership at the mission, which operates two recovery homes, one for men and another for women, and helps with transportation to treatment

through Rides4Recovery so others, like Mararri, can get some distance to heal.

"The Lord did supernatural heart surgery on me," says Mararri. "Now I get high on helping people and knowing I'm doing the right thing. I was a hopeless dope addict, addicted to heroin and crack, but now I'm a dope-less hope addict, addicted to Jesus. I'm dependable, I finish what I start. I can be a light in the community. I wouldn't have believed that could happen, before."

'As a church, we had to respond'

Only 20 percent of those treated locally for a drug overdose decide to go into recovery treatment, says April Caraway, executive director of the Trumbull County Mental Health and Recovery Board, the agency responsible for coordinating the county's response to the epidemic.

Ideally, anyone seeking treatment would be able to quickly get six to eight days in a medically supervised detox center, where severe withdrawal symptoms can be monitored and managed, and then 90 days in a residential treatment program. Ohio's expanded Medicaid coverage, part of the Affordable Care Act, covers the \$450-a-day cost for county residents who can't afford it.

But what happens after treatment? Many people in recovery leave residential treatment with no money, nowhere to go, and a long list of broken relationships strained by terrible choices made during the depth of addiction. The risk of relapse is high.

Faith-based recovery house programs help fill that gap. More than 30 recovery houses are operating in the county, several of which are run by Christian ministries. Pastor Julia has been raising money for the last year to open God's Refuge House, a long-term recovery home in Warren for women.

A few miles south in Liberty Township, April Mack, executive director of Project 180, manages Esther's Home for Women, another recovery house for women that opened this past summer.

The vision for Esther's Home grew out of Mack's ministry, with her husband, Pastor Roy Mack, at Grace Fellowship Church. The Macks moved to the area four years ago from the Atlanta suburbs. "We came here not having any idea," she says. "We began to realize how overwhelming [drug addiction] was in the community."

April Mack's first hint of the crisis was a text message from her daughters' high school, inviting her to a parents' meeting about recent heroin overdoses and drug arrests. "We started to hear the stories about kids, people in our church, people we were close to ... who were struggling. We felt that, as a church in Trumbull County, we had to respond. It was one of the greatest needs in our community."

Grace Fellowship welcomed Celebrate Recovery, a nationwide Christian 12-step recovery program. About 50 people meet every Monday night for prayer and fellowship. Grace also hosts Solace in the Valley, a grief support group started by one of its members for those who have lost a loved one from a drug-related cause.

The 'demonic' aspect

Across the state line in Greensburg, Pa., Catholic Bishop Edward Malesic issued a pastoral letter in June that addressed the spike in opioid-related deaths in his diocese.



“We need to show every person who is addicted to opioids that there is help and there is hope. We need to get the message out to every corner of our Diocese that those with an opioid addiction need not fear coming forward and seeking help; they need to know that we will not judge them, that we will not condemn them, and that, above all, we care for them,” he wrote.

Bishop Malesic noted that the Vatican has described drug addiction as “contemporary slavery” because “addiction destroys autonomy and free will.”

Pastor Kyle Tennant, of Grace United Methodist Church in Warren, agrees: The worsening crisis raises spiritual, moral, and ethical questions for the whole community. Tennant is one of a handful of religious leaders who participate in the county’s Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention, a board of community leaders working on prevention, awareness, and treatment efforts.

There’s a “demonic” aspect to the Mahoning Valley’s opioid epidemic, Tennant says, noting the connection between hopelessness and addiction. “Being created in the image of God means we were designed to be working and thriving, but the depressed economy in our county leaves a void that we try to fill ... and that often leads to sin,” he says. “Whether it’s pornography, or drugs, or sexual sin ... whatever

it is, we latch onto things that can’t bear the weight of a soul.”

Public health experts note that opioid’s powerful addictive properties literally change the brain of the user, creating cravings and compulsive behavior. While a drug user might initially *choose* to get high, that ability to choose quickly disappears. Soon, the user’s brain is singularly focused on getting more of the drug—even to the exclusion of eating and sleeping.

Despite a raging epidemic, constant news coverage, and awareness-raising efforts, Tennant says there’s still widespread confusion in the community about the very nature of addiction. Is it a moral failure? Is it a disease?

Those questions are important, but they often feel secondary in the midst of a crisis when families are scrambling to help loved ones get treatment, trying to care for abandoned children, or facing yet another young person’s funeral.

“The house is burning down. We don’t have time to argue over terms,” Tennant says. “We only have time to decide if we are going to run in and pull people out.” ■

Heidi Thompson grew up in Ohio’s Mahoning Valley and now lives in Washington, D.C.

Dominic Mararri of Warren Family Mission displays the week’s canned goods supplies. Five years into his own recovery from heroin addiction, Mararri credits the mission with helping him get into treatment.



Catholic Bishop Edward Malesic

KDKA News

What Can Churches Do?

IN JUNE, Bishop Ed Malesic of Greensburg, Pa., released “A Pastoral Letter on the Drug Abuse Crisis: From Death and Despair to Life and Hope.” In it he outlined several “first steps” that parishes could take in response to the region’s opioid epidemic, including:

- Parishes are encouraged to work with existing neighborhood, nonprofit, and government organizations to promote safe communities and neighborhoods to be free from drugs.
- Priests and deacons are invited to continue to offer spiritual support and, when appropriate, to speak about the drug abuse issue in homilies and during other formational opportunities.
- Parishes or regions of parishes are asked to consider developing support groups to help those addicted to opioids and their families to develop a deeper relationship with Jesus to give them strength.
- Parishes are asked to maintain a list of treatment centers and their phone numbers for referral purposes when the need arises.
- [A]ll parishes are requested to find ways to educate and form the members of their parish and community to combat the opioid addiction epidemic in our homes and families.
- Parishes should consider holding ongoing opportunities for prayer and healing related to the addiction crisis, especially by interceding at Mass for the recovery of addicted people and the healing of their loved ones. ■

Everyone Needs a Place to Heal

A model for recovery emerges in the Pacific Northwest • by KATE WILLETTE

WHEN KATHY KILLIAN NOE arrived in Seattle in 1999, she already had a lifetime of experience as a passionate advocate for the forgotten and the despised. She studied her new city with a simple question in mind: Where was the deepest need? She saw thousands of people struggling with mental illness and substance use disorders. She dreamed of finding a way to offer something those people were missing—something that might be called the advantages of family.

For lucky people, family means a reliable network of human beings who will never abandon you, who are always ready to give you the benefit of the doubt, whose love is reliable as rain. Family is the solace of being known and cherished. It's having someone call you to check

in, or bake you a cake, or just be happy to see you. It's having people who need you. Some of us are born into families like this, and some of us find them in loving faith communities that create families of choice.

Noe faced a whole population suffering from the lack of that kind of support—people who often didn't even know what it feels like to be cared for over the long haul in a thousand small but crucial ways. "Nine out of 10 Recovery Café members have experienced childhood trauma," Noe said, "and many have suffered one trauma after another." That these people also suffered from a variety of addictions and other mental health challenges only made their isolation more heartbreaking.

The most important ingredient in any meal is love. If one chooses the food, prepares the food, and presents the food with love, there will always be spiritual nourishment baked in along with the calories and flavors. And so, with the support of a small group of friends and New Creation Community—an ecumenical faith community in the tradition of Washington, D.C.'s Church of the Saviour—Noe

Photos by Jon Jensen



Staff and friends of Recovery Café Seattle, founded by Killian Noe (center with sign).



It takes time to bring
yourself to accept
what's offered,
especially when your
life has taught you
that you have
no value.

set out to find a way to fill the need for that kind of nourishment. The result was Recovery Café.

Today it sits on a noisy street in a busy area of downtown Seattle. If you come through the bright front door expecting a sort of dismal soup kitchen, you'll be astonished. Physically, the café is both lovely and lively. The colors and textures speak of home: soothing linen-tinted walls with accents in brick, pumpkin, and dark sea green. Plenty of natural wood adds to the sense of comfort, as do graceful hanging pendant lights and the arc of polished granite that forms the coffee bar. Dinner on a recent day included pasta tossed with bright chunks of yellow and red peppers, salmon dressed with fresh dill, and baskets of fragrant bread. Wide, clean windows look out on passing traffic and pedestrians.

You'll find people sitting together at small square tables, eating and chatting comfortably like the old friends that they have become. There will be people reading, doing puzzles, or using one of the computers set up near the door. There are men and women who use wheelchairs and others who look like they spend a lot of time at the gym. And you'll see people sitting alone, quietly keeping their eyes down. Usually those people are new; it takes time to understand that this place is about much more than a beautiful meal.

'The first time anyone cared'

It takes time to bring yourself to accept what's offered, especially when your life has taught you that you have no value. In her book about the founding of Recovery Café, *Descent into Love*, Noe told the story of William. William suffered from addiction, but he had been working hard at his recovery and made it his business to spend a lot of time at the café, until the day he got some bad news and relapsed. Normally that would mean weeks or months of isolation and using, but William was waiting on the doorstep of the café the very next morning when Noe came to work. When she asked him why he'd been so quick to get himself back, he said, "This is the first time anyone cared whether I returned or not."

William embodies an important truth. It's not enough to offer a safe, beautiful space and delicious food; he didn't come back for the free lunch. He came back because membership in the café is mutual. It mirrors the natural state of affairs between any people who share a loving bond. The café creates family-like mutuality and accountability through a model of membership that is both elegant and sturdy. They are "members," not clients, because clients are people who receive services. Members give and receive and, most important, *belong*.

There are only three requirements: 1) Be free of drugs

and alcohol for 24 hours; 2) attend a weekly meeting with a small, loving accountability group called a Recovery Circle; and 3) contribute to the community by maintaining the physical space and helping to create a culture of healing and unconditional love.

The heart of this program beats on these simple requirements. The first is an acknowledgment that addiction is real and damaging, but it's also a recognition that

the idea of "never again" is a terrifying barrier to someone who has been using drugs or alcohol addictively. Twenty-four hours is doable.

The Recovery Circles are a window into the deep power of Recovery Café. Meeting regularly with people who are prepared to love you for yourself is an intensely spiritual process. Doing so under the leadership of a trained member or community volunteer ensures that the process will be healthy. The circles allow struggling people to do their struggling safely, in the presence of a small, committed group of friends—and also, on better days, to celebrate with those same friends. Over time, the circles create a space to discover what has been missing for so many members of the café: a way through brokenness that grows organically and requires only willingness to be present and tell your truth. People who have never experienced being deeply known and loved not only feel the power in that, but they also learn the joy of offering it to others.

The third requirement takes the larger community and its home seriously. Like members of a family, members of the café pitch in with the dishes. They also take out the trash, sweep and mop the floors, work in the kitchen, and clean the bathrooms. Café members facilitate Recovery Circles, serve as recovery coaches, and advocate for more just city and state policies affecting their neighbors who are living on the margins. Doing all of this is what makes the café theirs. A formerly homeless member with serious mental health challenges told me that if not for the café, he would only have the room in which he sleeps. Smiling and gesturing with pride at the space, he said, "This is my living room."

In its 2016 financial statement, Recovery Café Seattle reported that its members donated more than 13,000 hours to the operation of the organization; local community volunteers matched that with more than 13,000 hours of their own time.

What I've described is the basic model of Recovery Café. It's a physical space made beautiful and warm through careful choices in furnishing and color. It has a kitchen and offers free meals—made with love—twice a day, five days a week, all year long. It creates conditions for the kind of healing that can only happen over time and with the patient, compassionate presence of other human beings. It transforms suffering into hope.



People come to Seattle's Recovery Café for much more than a beautiful meal.

A replicable model

It turns out that model can be replicated; indeed, it already has been. Recently I talked with Dana Bainbridge, who is the part-time pastor of First Christian Church in San Jose, Calif., and also part-time staff for the new Recovery Café San Jose, proudly housed in the church.

A few years ago Bainbridge was brutally forced to recognize that what her congregation was doing to help its neighbors wasn't working. "There was this really hard period where three or four people who were active in our meal program died over a short period of time, one of them literally on our doorstep," Bainbridge said. "On the steps of our building."

Bainbridge, who already knew of Noe's work, had heard that she'd started some kind of new project in Seattle. As it happened, there were a couple of people in her church who also knew of Noe. The three of them decided to take a trip north to see what this café thing was about. Maybe it would be something they could do in San Jose.

That visit convinced them that not only was it something they could do—it was something they were inspired to do. A slow, thoughtful process began, during which the Seattle team made itself available for everything from routine questions to visits to San Jose. For two years, Bainbridge and her congregation worked their careful way through a mountain of questions, doubts, and possible repercussions. During that time there were more visits to Seattle, along with many, many phone calls and emails.

Recovery Café San Jose opened its doors on April 1, 2014.

First Christian Church had been a tiny congregation of 20 or 30 people using a building designed to hold 250 for worship. It's still a small congregation, but it's also become a busy, self-sustaining place where people's lives are being transformed. Bainbridge is passionate about the way the café has opened up this possibility for partnership.

"People still come to churches in times of need, maybe because we're easier to access than other social service organizations," Bainbridge said. "But for some small churches like ours, the amount and depth of the



Recovery Café transforms suffering into hope.

need is overwhelming. So we either wall ourselves off because it's too much, or we try to do things we're not equipped to do. We were lucky. We had a chance to adopt the healing structure of the Recovery Café. That helped us launch a separate organization that includes—but is much more than—the caring ministry of our church."

By spring 2017, Recovery Café San Jose—just three years into its work in the community—was thrilled to launch a major renovation of the church property. Part of the joy came at a fundraising event where three café members shared their stories of healing and brought a crowd of 400 supporters to their feet. The moment was a poignant, hard-won answer to the deaths that had sent the church in search of a better idea.

The model works outside of a church context, too. Recovery Café Everett, north of Seattle, opened in March 2015 after former Seattle café volunteer Wendy Grove was inspired to make it happen in her own community. Grove had been a classroom teacher and a writer; today she runs the Everett café out of a small, open-spaced house. Her team's problem now—a little more than two years in—is



that the building is too small to hold all the people who want to become members.

The best part of doing this work, Grove said, comes when she witnesses a softening in the protective armor worn by so many lost and forgotten people. One day, one of their members who had been waiting months to get into a treatment center had fallen short of the 24-hour sobriety requirement. They had to ask him to leave. As he walked off down the alley, a staff member called after him, in the voice of a friend who does not give up, “We love you!”

“I know,” came the reply. “That’s why I keep coming back.”

Recovery Café Spokane quietly opened its doors on Valentine’s Day, 2017. Director Georgia Butler was deliberate about taking things slowly. She’d been to the Seattle café, so she knew what was possible, but she also wanted to create a café that would meet the particular needs of her city. “You have to look at what your community needs are,” she said. “The biggest gap here is *between* inpatient and outpatient, and *after* outpatient. Those were the gaps.”

After seven months and with no outreach beyond word-of-mouth, Recovery Café Spokane was serving lunch to as many as 20 people every day. Their Recovery Circles have become an important healing place for people on medication-assisted treatment for methadone addiction, because many traditional 12-step groups don’t welcome such people. The word of the café’s radical hospitality is spreading; this fall local radio station KXLY chose the café for an Extreme Team Makeover.

At the other end of the scale is Interfaith Works, a major nonprofit operating in Montgomery County, Md., which borders Washington, D.C. Interfaith Works runs 14 programs that serve 16,000 people. Last year, CEO Shane Rock found himself at a meeting of business leaders, government officials, and community members. Rock, as it happened, had lived in Seattle and knew about the Recovery Café model—in fact, he’d had the idea of trying

to replicate it on the East Coast for years. The subject of this meeting was how to deal with the “problem of street homelessness,” especially in the context of deep distrust for social service systems. A bell rang in the back of his

mind. “It occurred to me that the Recovery Café model might be absolutely appropriate to create a community that was welcoming outside of the social service world ... there wasn’t anything like that here.” Very quickly, Rock had the

attention of the head of county government, local nonprofit leaders, and his own board of directors. This fall, when Recovery Café Seattle presents a training program for interested groups, Rock will be there with members of his team.

Recovery Café Seattle now has a dedicated team to help interested people discern whether and how the model could work in their communities. The Recovery Café Network supports the whole process, from curiosity to launch to operation. Noe describes the goal: “We seek to partner with groups or organizations with a minimum of two or three people who are deeply called to this venture, believe in our core commitments, support multiple pathways to recovery, have experience in recovery, and can devote the time and resources to bring a Recovery Café to life.”

Just as individuals joining a particular café commit to certain requirements, groups or organizations interested in joining the network are asked to honor four core commitments: 1) Create a space that is drug and alcohol free; 2) empower every member to become a contributor; 3) nurture Recovery Circles as structures of loving accountability; 4) ensure responsible stewardship of assets.

Creating a new café, like creating a new family, is difficult and rewarding. It’s exciting and risky. It’s beautiful in the way that every risk taken in the name of love is beautiful, holy, and precious. The dream is that in every community, willing hearts will have the tools to create and sustain a place to heal and belong. ■

Kate Willette’s most recent book is *Don’t Call It a Miracle*. She lives in Seattle, where she volunteers at Recovery Café.

“We love you!”
“I know. That’s why I keep coming back.”



A History of Violence

“THIS TIFFANY stained glass window was donated by parishioners in honor of Jefferson Davis,” said our guide, Barbara Holley.

Holley is a member of the “history and reconciliation initiative” at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Richmond, Va. St. Paul’s, located across the street from the Virginia general assembly and around the corner from the Confederate White House, was called “the Cathedral of the Confederacy” for a reason (see “Robert E. Lee Worshipped Here: A Southern church wrestles with its Confederate history,” by Betsy Shirley, in the April 2017 issue of *Sojourners*).

Fragments of stained glass honor Confederate President Jefferson Davis and Gen. Robert E. Lee. Both men gleaned inspiration, comfort, and resources for their cause here. Their pews are marked with commemorative plaques.

A diverse group of historians and St. Paul’s parishioners, led by chair Linda Armstrong, has worked methodically for a year and a half to unearth the artifacts of white



Robert E. Lee statue in Richmond, Va.

Amnesia and conflicts of memory render us vulnerable to manipulation. Thus, common memory is essential for peace.

THE VERY FOUNDING of Richmond has its roots in domination. In 1734, the Virginia House of Burgesses asked Virginia planter and surveyor William Byrd II to plan a town. Byrd, justified by the 15th century “Doctrine of Discovery,” claimed land at the falls of the James River and named it after similar land in London. The spirit of colonization claimed dominion on that day. It declared exclusive right to rule and demanded

the exploitation or extinction of the other. Then as now, the construct of race was a tool of colonization, a mechanism used to claim, protect, and preserve power.

Over the next century, as Benjamin Campbell explains in *Richmond’s Unhealed History*, Richmond grew into the second largest slave market in the U.S. And while the Civil War and Reconstruction presented formidable challenges to white dominion, the backlash was fierce.

In 1888, Benjamin

Harrison, a former Union Army colonel, defeated incumbent president Grover Cleveland, an anti-Reconstruction Democrat. Months later a Confederate association formed in Richmond and began construction of a monument to Confederate soldiers and sailors. Two years later, a statue of Robert E. Lee was installed on what became Richmond’s “Monument Avenue.” Over the next five years, according to the group Monroe Work Today, white Virginians lynched 34 African-American men—a 340 percent rise in lynchings over the previous five years. Backlash against Harrison’s attempts to protect African-American voting rights helped set the stage for Cleveland to win back the presidency in the next election. The monument to Confederate soldiers and sailors was established at the highest point in Richmond, atop a Native American burial ground, months after Cleveland was sworn in for the second time. For a time, the rage to protect white supremacy was mollified. Lynchings in Virginia dropped to six over the next five years—an 82 percent decline. Murder is less necessary to protect power when law and policy will do the bidding.

The civil rights movement chipped away at the 20th century white supremacist infrastructure, but it did not tear it down. Eradication will require common memory, common interrogation of colonizing theologies, and common courage to dream together of a new way of being in the world. ■

Lisa Sharon Harper, author of *The Very Good Gospel*, is founder and president of *FreedomRoad.us*, which is working with the initiative for Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation in Richmond, Va.



The Confederate statues of Richmond rest on a centuries-old foundation.

supremacy preserved in the church’s windows, pews, sermons, vestry rolls, and minutes of meetings. They discovered documents that confirm St. Paul’s vestry members were among the original architects of the Confederacy, the legal scaffolding of Jim Crow in Virginia, and 20th century redlining.

Think about that: The architecture of white supremacy in the U.S. was literally crafted in and by the church. Only now are we beginning to piece together the stained and distorted fragments of our history; intentionally broken, twisted, and erased from common memory.

EBITDA		1,000	80,750	106,000	171,000	213,750
Pre-tax income		-31,883	41,317	69,436	131,808	172,300
Taxes	21.5%	0	2,028	14,929	28,339	37,040
After tax income		-31,883	39,289	54,507	103,469	135,250
Pre-tax income		-31,883	41,317	69,436	131,808	172,300
Depreciation		19,333	26,000	26,000	26,000	28,333
Capital expenditures		-400,000	0	0	0	-200,000
Loan b/f repayments		0	0	0	0	0
New loan repayments		-5,281	-5,397	-5,516	-5,638	-5,760
Pref Share repayments		0	0	0	0	0
Taxation						-4,290
Working Capital						0

How to Succeed

Why I train future business leaders to see the common good as part of their bottom line.

by JoANN FLETT, as told to Julie Polter

When we think of the church and business, we tend to think of them at opposite ends of a spectrum. We often think of businesspeople as a certain kind of person, one that doesn't conjure up the best images of humanity.

I was privileged, early on, to have friends who were very successful business leaders. What drew me to them was that they were people whose faith mattered to them; they led their organizations without making a big fanfare about this, but they were leading from a faith perspective.

I admired that they ran successful companies that transformed their employees, their business partners, and their local communities. But nobody seemed to celebrate them in their local churches. It's easy to think of teachers and nurses, people in the "helping professions," as doing God's work. Yet there are people of faith who lead powerful and influential organizations. These people go to work and make critical decisions, and their faith has all kinds of implications about how they live in the world, but their work is not being affirmed on Sunday.

I liked business and accounting. I felt and followed God's call into that space. And yet I also wanted to do ministry. When I was younger this seemed to be two separate things. So first I had to redefine ministry as neither sacred nor secular. Rather I had to learn that ministry is any activity that draws people into relationship with God. This redefinition was the start of understanding that business is a medium of relationships. I began to wonder: Could business be seen in a new paradigm of service and ministry that is based on relationships?

A reformation of business

For myself, that new paradigm is embodied through the Eastern University MBA program. The program weaves expert business acumen with theological, sociological, and political knowledge.

It's the gospel of enough, which is a pretty radical idea.

50	237,500	235,000	242,500	241,500	241,000	232,500	267,500
01	192,333	181,081	188,714	199,350	192,988	186,630	226,691
45	41,352	38,933	40,574	42,860	41,492	40,125	48,739
56	150,981	142,149	148,141	156,489	151,496	146,504	177,952
01	192,333	181,081	188,714	199,350	192,988	186,630	226,691
31	33,143	43,857	43,857	43,857	43,857	41,857	37,857
00	0	-300,000	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	-5,889	-6,019	-6,151	-6,287	-6,425	-6,567	-6,712
0	-100,000	0	0	-200,000	0	0	-100,000
95				-157,902			
35				32,472	-16,236		

in Business

Incidentally, on some level I want to ask theological institutions to train pastors to see CEOs, CFOs, COOs, and other business leaders in their congregations as people who do more than write big checks or can tell you how to better organize a megachurch efficiently. Pastors need to affirm these leaders in their role and challenge and encourage them to embody the gospel. Who do they think Jesus is and what bearing does that have for us?

I find that Christian businesspeople have thought about this question in innovative and creative ways. But we (faith-based institutions) have not provided a place for them to speak their truth. Such truth would inform a practical theology that goes into the work of better equipping pastors and ministers in churches and create, if you will, a virtuous circle. They will hear what's happening in their congregants' lives. And together pastor and congregant will be able to respond in thoughtful ways of interpreting and enacting scripture.

I know that there's bad business. There's no question that a certain orientation of business can be bad for the world. But business oriented to embody positive relationships—a reformation of business—is good for the world. You can use it as a force for good to empower people, to recognize their creativity and innovation, and to lift up the entrepreneurs and business leaders in our midst.

I am suggesting that the narrative of business as being about establishing relationships is critically important. God as represented by a trinity of persons is relational. We are created in God's image and thus created to be relational people. Business is a medium that can uphold the rightness of relationships, and in so doing can create *value*, not just wealth.

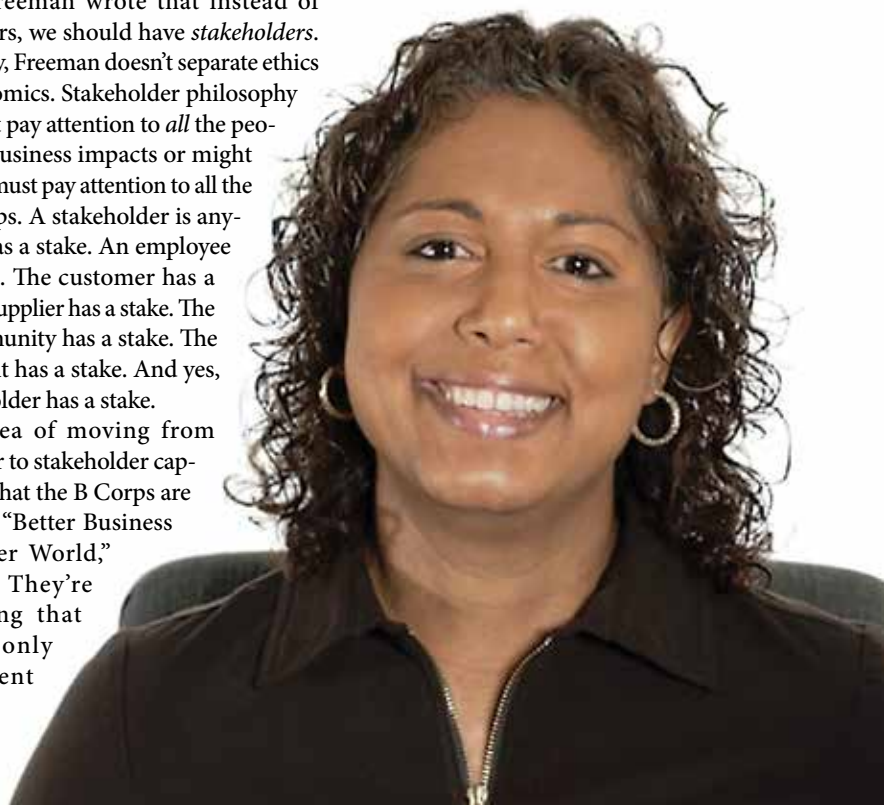
From stockholders to stakeholders

A triple-bottom-line business judges success in terms of people, the planet, and profit, and is a corrective for the single bottom line. Single-bottom-line, profit-maximization thinking was encouraged by economist Milton Friedman. He understood that if people bought stock in a company, they were the owners of that company, and the managers were to be agents of these owners, managing these companies for the owners' rights and privileges. That was a good enough theory for a lot of people in business schools. They started to prioritize the stockholder, and thus stockholder-wealth maximization became convention.

Friedman's idea was introduced in the 1970s. In the 1980s, business ethicist R. Edward Freeman wrote that instead of stockholders, we should have *stakeholders*. Importantly, Freeman doesn't separate ethics from economics. Stakeholder philosophy says, I must pay attention to *all* the people that a business impacts or might impact—I must pay attention to all the relationships. A stakeholder is anyone who has a stake. An employee has a stake. The customer has a stake. The supplier has a stake. The local community has a stake. The government has a stake. And yes, the stockholder has a stake.

The idea of moving from stockholder to stakeholder capitalism is what the B Corps are doing (see "Better Business for a Better World," page 29). They're recognizing that profit is only one element

JOANN FLETT decided at a young age that she loved both spreadsheets and Jesus. After more than 20 years of senior accounting and management experience, she now directs the masters in business administration program at Eastern University, a theologically informed curriculum with a strong sense of social justice that equips students with business acumen to serve God and society through business. She sat with *Sojourners* senior associate editor Julie Polter in June to tell her story.



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Loan repayments		0	0	0	0	0
New loan repayments		-5,281	-5,397	-5,516	-5,638	-5,760
Provision for bad debts		0	0	0	0	0
Taxation						-45,290
Working Capital		2,178	-53,579	-14,613	-42,214	-42,000

Business oriented in a different way, a reformation of business, is good for the world.

of success. You don't maximize profit at the expense of your customers, employees, or the people and resources in your supply chain. You must manage all those things well.

Moreover, countless business organizations, from UPS to Starbucks to Herman Miller to Patagonia to Greyston Bakery, understand that prioritizing stakeholders over stockholders actually creates value, not just for the stockholders but for all. The organization gets value. The employees get value. Customers get value. Society benefits.

A tool for restoration

MBA students are the ones most likely to end up in corporate leadership roles. These students might take one course in business ethics, which may or may not actually challenge the very strategy by which they do business. Only one course in an entire MBA program, at most—some programs don't offer ethics courses at all.

What if the very idea of how you do business is demonstrated by values infused throughout the curriculum? What if the paradigm for how to do business is to restore shalom—to restore flourishing? By shalom, I use philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff's description. Wolterstorff says that shalom involves rightness of relationship with God, with others, with self, and with creation. That's a pretty comprehensive idea of shalom. And we know that God's work in the world is to restore shalom.

This idea of shalom and human flourishing is deeply embedded in the curriculum of the Eastern MBA in economic development. The program was envisioned by Tony Campolo, who had a sociological vision for how to conduct business, together with Ron Sider, who had a politically engaged

and social justice orientation, and Samuel Escobar, who called for a theological vision for business. These founders saw a global marketplace without a distinctly Christian narrative for business and desired to challenge the prevailing paradigm. Notably, if we only prioritize wealth for one group of people, that's a very bad idea of what business is and ought to be. The future becomes very much about individuals and short-termism: What's mine now?

My perspective is that we read Adam Smith poorly if we detach *The Wealth of Nations* from his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Smith was a moral philosopher before being given the title of economist. He revised *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* six times throughout his life, as his mag-

If we only prioritize wealth for one group of people, that's a very bad idea of what business ought to be.

num opus. It is believed he didn't revise *The Wealth of Nations* once.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith writes that the marketplace is a place of empathy. This is very different from his concept of an "invisible hand" that is detached from any other kind of relationship. The lack of relational thinking in the latter concept has impacted interpretations of *The Wealth of Nations* and helps to promote business as an impersonal force. This kind of thinking has dominated the mainstream academic business sphere.

But a marketplace as a place of empathy is more in line with a theological view of business. More compatible with the idea that business can serve as a tool for the restoration of the world. Nonprofits and NGOs

are waking up to that realization. If we want to alleviate poverty, we have to recognize that dignity is more important than wealth. We're going to have to support people who can innovate, create, and lift themselves and their families out of poverty, who know how to achieve their own solutions but lack resources to achieve this aim. God gave them that innate problem-solving ability; we just need to infuse resources and then they can create their own solutions.

Market and mission can inform each other. The separation of the sacred and secular have not helped us in a world that needs each dimension to collaborate and come together to access resources in the biggest money sector—business. We have corporations that have created mas-

sive amounts of wealth, and yet some of us in the church don't want to engage with the business world to challenge the prevailing notion of profit maximization. Perhaps part of being a prophetic voice is to challenge

corporations on the core aspects of their strategy—how are they building value for everyone, for all stakeholders? This doesn't sacrifice profit, but rather changes the paradigm from maximizing profit for stockholders to maximizing the benefit for all people and the planet. In some ways it's enacting the gospel of enough, which is a pretty radical idea.

'You don't need to hoard'

I am part of a faith community at Broad Street Ministry that works with vulnerable Philadelphians as we seek to offer radical hospitality. All are welcomed at the Eucharist, and we ask of those partaking in communion to take as much bread as they want. And then to take a little bit more than

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33,143	43,857					
0	-300,000					
0	0					
-5,889	-6,019					
-100,000	0					
-40,590	-16,236					

they were going to take—because this bread represents the body of Christ and is a sign of God’s grace to each one of us, and there is enough grace for all.

What is so powerful about that image is that the invitation is offered to people who are physically, financially, emotionally, and spiritually hungry. The word “enough”—that’s not in their vocabulary. They’re traumatized by not ever having enough. Perhaps the gospel to a world spinning on a wheel of greed and scarcity is to say we have a gospel of enough. It is a narrative that speaks to God’s work in the world.

Some think that having business managers operate under a paradigm of enough is a problematic idea, because they think that will stall some people—they will assume they don’t need to expand or innovate.

But I’m suggesting the opposite. I am suggesting you don’t need to hoard. You don’t need to hoard the cash on your balance sheet, or your personal wealth. You can deploy some of those resources to make sure that you’re addressing social costs such as pollution, poverty, inequality, and unemployment that are now being externalized to society. A Christian vision of business suggests that it is a force that can be oriented toward God, and as such can create value by prioritizing and honoring relationships.

I love Jesus and spreadsheets, but I also love people. My teaching, research, and scholarship has been driven by a deep desire to craft a theological vision for business—one that illuminates how the relational elements of the gospel, business, and people are inextricably linked. This has implications for how business is talked about in our churches, how it is taught in our seminaries and Christian universities, and its engagement in our parachurch organizations. ■

Better Business for a Better World

B Corps are to business what Fair Trade certification is to coffee.

—bcorporation.net

by **CHRISTINA COLÓN**

WHAT DO PATAGONIA, Ben & Jerry’s, and Etsy have in common? They’re all B Corporations. As part of the B Corp movement, they have committed to using business to build a better and more sustainable world. Along with 2,294 other corporations, they have signed a “Declaration of Interdependence” and are attempting to redefine the for-profit sector.

To become a B Corp, businesses must complete the B Impact Assessment, which scores the company on its environmental impact, relationship to its workforce, commitment to the community, and transparency in governance, as well as the benefit of the product to customers.

In 2016, the B Corp Community launched the “inclusive economy challenge” to encourage for-profit entities to think critically about the economy and work to create opportunities for all people to flourish. During the pilot year, 175 B Corps took on the challenge; together they eliminated wage gaps and expanded company ownership.

B Corps represent a wide range of goods and services, from accounting to skateboards (and much more). Here are some examples:



Homefree recognizes that food is a means of inclusion, making allergy-friendly baked treats in a dedicated facility free of gluten, peanuts, tree nuts, eggs, wheat, and dairy.



Farm Dog Naturals is a woman-owned, sustainable company that uses ethically sourced ingredients to make safe and environmentally friendly herbal remedies for pets.



Ditto Hangers makes closets eco-friendlier with biodegradable clothes hangers made from heavy-duty fiberboard that fit 100 percent more clothing in small closets.

Luscious Garage is a woman-owned and -operated San Francisco auto repair shop that specializes in hybrid vehicles and incorporates environmental practices throughout the business.



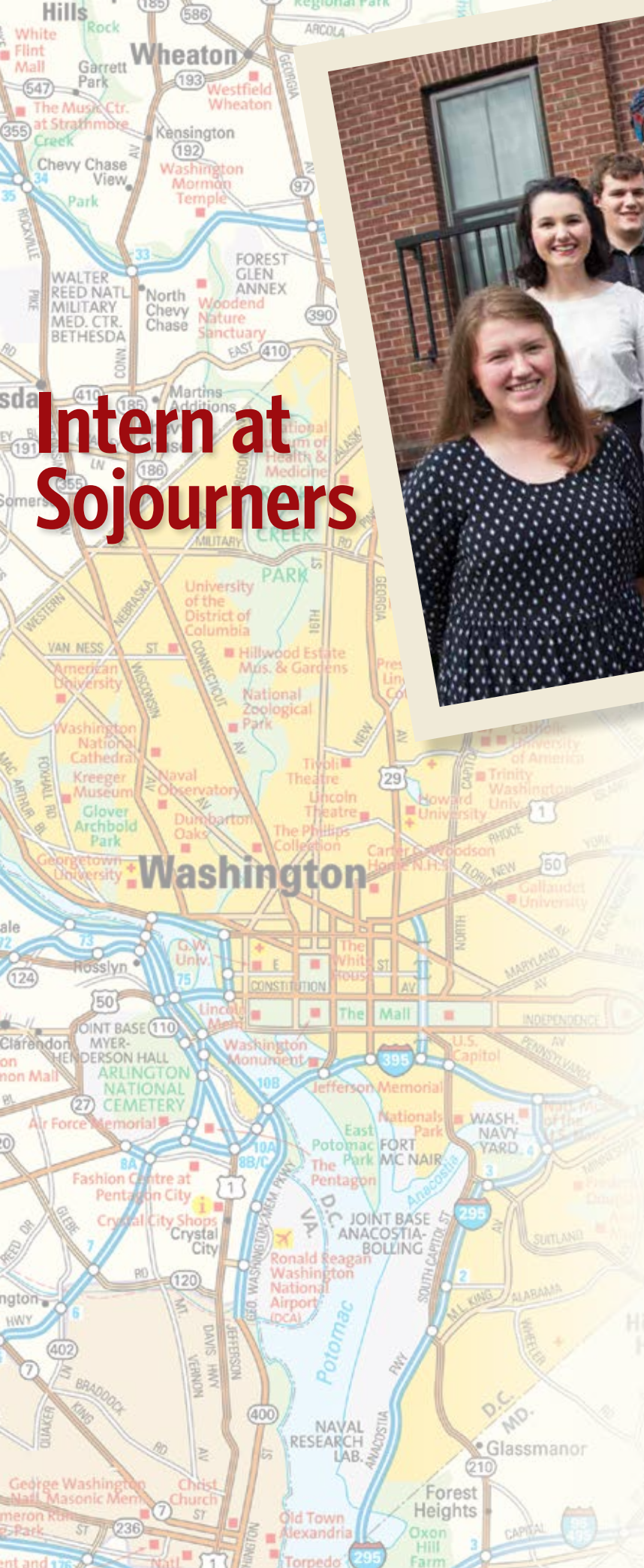
KeepCup designed the first “barista standard reusable cup” that allows people to enjoy their coffee while not contributing to disposable cup waste.

Be Inspired Films is a U.K. company creating multimedia content for socially engaged organizations. ■

Christina Colón is an editorial assistant for Sojourners.



From
Be Inspired
Films’
educational
series



Intern at Sojourners



JP Keenan

FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS, Sojourners' internship program has equipped leaders to articulate the biblical call to social justice. Be a part of our yearlong intern program, which combines full-time jobs in our office with an opportunity to live in intentional community—all in the heart of the nation's capital. We offer positions in editing, online media, event planning, advocacy, donor services, executive management, advertising, and communications.

Our unique internship program is one of Christian discipleship and vocational discernment. The program is open to people of all ages and career paths. To learn more about the program and the application process, visit sojo.net/interns.

The application for the 2018-19 cohort is now available online. The deadline for applications is Feb. 15, 2018. (Please note that this deadline is earlier than in previous years.)

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Showing Up

THE WALL WASN'T supposed to come down.

Günter Schabowski, a spokesperson for the East German Politburo, was tired. He hadn't thoroughly read the travel regulation updates, handed to him shortly before his news conference. He didn't know the document's shifts in rhetoric, developed by leaders in the East German government, were simply an attempt to appease the swelling ranks of East Germans demanding reform. On Nov. 9, 1989, facing journalists' cameras and notepads, Schabowski took questions for a forgettable almost-hour. Then someone asked about rumors the border may open.

Schabowski mumbled over his answer, confused. But a few of his words were clear: "Immediately ... right away."

Reporters pounced. Breathless reports in West German media soon filtered over the wall through East Germans' pirated signals. The

differently from any other European city—the result of careful, often-painful architectural choices to openly acknowledge its past (there is still graffiti in the Reichstag building from the Soviet forces who swept in as Nazism fell), while not celebrating it (Hitler's "memorial" at his site of death is a plaque and a car park).

In the wake of Charlottesville and the debate in the U.S. about memorializing history, Berlin was held up as an example of a healthy way to "never forget" and never revere. When I was in Berlin in July, I saw *Dunkirk* in a theater with an enthusiastic, mostly young audience—interesting only for how utterly natural and unremarkable it felt. The next day I walked past the glass cupola topping the Reichstag, a symbol of democratic transparency and people's watchful eye over their government. In many ways, the city indicates it has moved on.

But parts of the wall remain. At one spot, just beyond the replica of Coventry Cathedral's Statue of Reconciliation, I peered through a slit on the Eastern side. Ahead of me stretched a grassy expanse—the "no man's land"—and a guard tower. On the far wall were the scrawled words, "Our side never built a wall to keep its people in."

The target of a wall's control can change quickly. Few people believed the wall would be built—then, even while the East German government was building it, few knew it wouldn't come with gates to freely pass through. Once up, few thought it would stay up long. For decades, those who risked their lives—and



Celebrating a breach in the Berlin Wall in 1989.

their dignity, freedom, and social standing—trying to escape were understood by some as foolhardy—tragic figures who risked everything for something patience or acquiescence could have solved.

But the wall came down, in part, because people believed the news and showed up. The Berlin Wall opened on Nov. 9, 1989—28 years after it was built, 27 years almost to the day before those threatening to build walls were voted in to lead our own U.S. government, and 28 years before Germany's far-right party claimed 94 seats in the country's parliament in this fall's election.

It's worth remembering, now, that while much destruction can come from human error, small mistakes can also sometimes course-correct for good. We're entering Advent now, a season that teaches us, at the end of every year, how to pay attention for movements toward hope and transformation: "Watch, for you know not when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning; lest he come suddenly, and find you sleeping" (Mark 13:35-36). ■

Catherine Woodiwiss is deputy web editor at Sojourners.

"One of the most momentous events of the past century was an accident, a semicomical and bureaucratic mistake."

Politburo had assured checkpoint guards that no changes had been made, but it was too late—a trickle of curious East Berliners quickly grew to massive crowds, yelling "Open the gate!" At a loss, and unable to get through to leadership for clarification or backup, the guards eventually gave in. Within hours, nearly 40 years of iron-fisted East-West divide was undone.

"One of the most momentous events of the past century was, in fact, an accident, a semicomical and bureaucratic mistake," wrote historian M.E. Sarotte.

Berlin wears its history



A photograph of two identical folding chairs with orange seats and backs and silver metal frames. They are positioned on a wooden floor against a light-colored wall, facing each other with their backs to the camera. A thin black arrow points downwards from the top center of the image towards the text.

**We decided to talk
together across the
political divide.
The apocalypse
didn't ensue.**



by KATHARINE M. PRESTON

An Experiment in Neighborly Love

THE UNEXPECTED CONVERSATION happened near the end of church coffee hour. As I headed toward the kitchen to drop off my cup and a small plate dotted with crumbs of coffee cake, I found myself in a brief exchange with some fellow parishioners. Perhaps something in the sermon that Sunday prompted it; I don't recall. I do remember the clear revelation that this conversation somehow had to continue, because for the first time I was talking about a dicey political situation with fellow parishioners far more conservative than me.

Fed up with avoiding these conversations, I suggested: "We need to continue this."

They agreed.

We need civic dialogue, following the biblical admonition to

As in many rural areas in the U.S., we find ourselves deeply divided politically. Our president continues to promise to save America from what he deems wrong, which, he assures us, is most everything, especially from the last eight years. He keeps us busy chasing the rabbits he releases from his tweets, running all over the place. Some, opposing his views, march, write myriad letters to our representatives, sign petitions, and flood our newspapers with commentary. Others who support the president write letters to the editor praising his leadership and thanking him for following through with his promises, even when thwarted by the courts or an uncooperative Congress.

At times the divide is breathtaking.

Although we live in a small town, we tend to remain isolated from some of our neighbors as we move in different social circles, attend different events. For those who do politics, loyalty to different parties is strong.

But to our credit, and thanks to a great deal of grace, our small Episcopal church houses a broad spectrum of opinion.

Usually, hot topics are not broached. We recognize the polarization, and nobody likes it. But we are also neighbors who care for and about each other. We want to try to love through the gaps, to move beyond the subtle demonization of each other's views. So as an experiment, working together with others outside of our church, we decide to start a series of conversations we call "Different Voices," inviting other townspeople to join us.

Entering uncharted territory

We meet on a Sunday afternoon at our little town library—neutral territory—seated in a circle of folding chairs between the stacks. Refreshments for later are on a big table pushed to one side. Twenty-one of us attend this trial meeting, a mix of differing views. I am delighted at the turnout, but anxious. In this experiment in neighborly love, we step into uncharted territory.

Our statement of purpose emphasizes that we will not seek to change each other's minds or to find solutions to problems, but to understand each other, to find a path for communication through turbulent waters.

We agree to rules of engagement: Listen actively; try to understand and respect

viewpoints other than one's own; seek common concerns and values; steer away from trying to "educate" on the issue; everyone should have a chance to talk; stay on the subject for the day. No partisan politics.

I and a more-conservative neighbor and friend lightly facilitate the group discussion. We start by working around the circle, each voicing our fears and feelings about the topic at hand.

First up: immigration. Although vivid in the national spotlight, this topic is removed for most of us in rural northern New York. Those who show up for the discussion are white, well-off, educated, mostly middle-aged, Christian or nonaligned. We are unlikely to witness deportations, and we live far from urban areas where terrorism is more likely to strike. Our fears are detached, in no way immediate, but nonetheless very heartfelt and real.

One woman fears sharia law could spread across the country. Another, that terrorists will slip in over the border from Canada (just 56 miles to our north) with immigrants and harm us. Others fear the net that Immigration and Customs Enforcement has thrown out will catch innocent people, tear families apart, and trample on constitutional rights. Someone is anxious about the economic consequences if there is no one to pick apples in our local orchards each year. Another worries that immigrants take jobs away from Americans and drive wages down. Someone wonders how much of our tax money underwrites services for immigrants.

I am pleased that people feel free to express themselves, but astonished at the breadth of the fears expressed. Some, from my perspective, are unfounded or unlikely to unfurl into reality. But we carefully avoid getting into a discussion of facts, alternative facts, and fake news, because that will simply take us to the bottom of the swamp, where we will not see each other.

Instead, we find ourselves moving into a conversation about what it is to be an American, what is most sacred to us. The Constitution is frequently mentioned. Some say the Pledge of Allegiance should be required of all. Also, learning English. We talk about immigrant assimilation and diversity. Can we have both? Perhaps we are not a melting pot of homogeneity but rather



a tapestry of different strands, held together within a beautiful, affirming border. Can we all live with that image?

The conversation remains civil, respectfully searching to understand each other. We do not attempt to resolve the issue. We have simply walked down a path together.

People leave very satisfied with the shared experience, deciding to discuss climate change at the next meeting.

Hearing the range of fears

Two weeks later, a few new people who heard about the success of the opening session join us; a few from the first group are unable to come.

Although nobody seems to doubt the reality of climate change, there is still a range of opinion: "I fear for the future of the planet and most especially for the poor, who are experiencing the killing effects of climate change right now." "I am just here to listen. I don't know enough about the topic." "Climate change is simply too all-encompassing. Just not the first thing on my agenda each day." "I fear not only for humans, but for all the other species that are being killed." "People really don't want to change their habits. They don't want certain comforts of living taken away."

I know a lot about climate change,

love all neighbors, including those who disagree with us.



having worked in and about the environmental field for more than 40 years. Some others around the circle are as well-informed. We bite our tongues over misconceptions because our rule is to “not educate” during these discussions. The lack of knowledge on climate change among some surprises me, but I am encouraged by their desire to know more. The meeting makes clear to all the urgent need, in another setting, for more information about the causes of climate change and the effects, present and future, on our immediate environment. For now, we have heard the range of each other’s fears.

We decide our third meeting will be on the media. A consensus is reached almost immediately on several issues: a critical attitude toward social media (except by the one 20-something in our midst); the efficacy of the internet to spread fake news; and the importance of a discerning public, no matter what newspaper or newsfeed you read or program you watch.

During our fourth meeting, we have some fun: Working together, we answer the 100 questions about our government that people applying for citizenship must be prepared to answer. We are pleased that, collectively, it was easier than we expected to answer most of the questions.

Predictably, a subsequent discussion, on federalism, reveals some disagreement on what issues should remain with the states versus the federal government. But there is broad agreement that the responsibilities should be shared. Some self-deprecating amusement bubbles up about how views on federalism quickly shift according to who holds political power at the federal level. With the help of the historian in our midst, we all find a new appreciation for the complexity facing the framers of the Constitution and for their wisdom.

Neighbors help neighbors

This kind of discussion might seem hopelessly passive, naïve, and a waste of time, given the severity of the threat on social justice felt by some these days. But the polarization did not start with the election of President Trump. Both conservatives and progressives know what it feels like to experience alienation and frustration at the state of the country. Talking exclusively with those with whom we agree simply hardens our positions and makes us angrier.

We desperately need civic dialogue, following the biblical admonition to love all neighbors, including those who disagree with us. After all, neighbors help neighbors, regardless of their fears or political

I’m astonished at the breadth of the fears expressed.

leanings. If neighbors experience a fire, a flood, a job loss, or the death of a loved one, no one asks how they feel about immigration, climate change, or even abortion. And no one asks them how they voted in the last election. We simply help.

The fundamental challenge facing people of faith—conservative and progressive alike—is to not sit on our high horse of moral righteousness and dismiss the other as uninformed or simply wrong.

As recent books (*Hillbilly Elegy*, *Strangers in Their Own Land*) have shown, deep fears concerning personal identity persist in our times, as in other times in our history. When your family and your community have been defined for generations by the work that you and your neighbors

do—coal mining, manufacturing, farming, oil and gas refining—pressures from outside present a threat. Fears for your future hit you in the gut. And anyone who tells you they will defend you from changes looks like a savior.

In my community, the identity politics of the Right are not quite as visceral, often relating more to bedrock loyalty to the Republican Party and to a conservative agenda they feel was sidelined for eight years. Last Nov. 8, many of them weighed the disgust they felt at the candidate’s actions and messaging against the hope that he could bring the country back to another era.

At the core, our fears are not all that different. “My country is changing so much that I no longer feel a part of it.” One person fears sharia law will take over, another fears fascism will. One fears that her grandchildren will not experience “home” in the same way due to climate changes, another fears “home” has already changed due to the exit of mining or industry from the community. Everyone fears “fake news” will destroy the credibility of our constitutionally protected media, but each has a different opinion about which sources “fake” it.

I wonder: Maybe all these fears are irrational, given the deeper goodness and integrity we share in the American spirit. Those people who gathered for these discussions in our little town library leave with two valuable experiences: 1) at least some recognition of nuances on the issue being discussed, and 2) a new feeling of empathy and understanding for those we thought to be on the other “side.”

Because people gather as communities of faith for reasons that transcend (at least ideally) the politics of the day, our places of worship can offer opportunities to start new conversations, seeking to love each other through our fears of opposing political positions. Knowing that God accompanies us all—no matter what the path—can mitigate these fears. The important invitation is to ask neighbors to walk alongside. ■

Katharine M. Preston is an ecumenical lay preacher and writer, concentrating on issues of social justice and climate change.

Dark Advent

In the beginning was the end
and in the end, silence
and the silence is God.
She was and is God,
all of life born through her.

She flashes rays of darkness
and the whiteness does not overcome her
because in her is life
and her life is flesh
like midnight.

In the dark
her eyes flicker *tehom*
and her chest trembles mine
with the quiet of the most high.

We have seen her glory:
a raven's black sheen,
beauty's shadow.

*Isaac S. Villegas is pastor
of Chapel Hill Mennonite
Fellowship in North
Carolina.*



Earth's New Vulnerabilities

ONE OF THE conceits of modern life is that it's always going to work out, always going to be okay. Indeed, it's going to be better than it ever was. But the world is testing that idea.

When Hurricane Maria slammed into Puerto Rico—its buzz-saw eye ripping from one end of the island to the other—it changed almost everything in the course of a few hours. Gone were airports and roads. Eighty percent of the island's crops were destroyed—think of that. Almost all the cell towers: There were profound

of solar microgrids, so that there couldn't be this kind of devastation ever again. But, of course, that's not what we're doing—at best, FEMA is trying to stand back up what was there before. But even that is going to be a stretch, because the damage that was done to the island is the equivalent of 30 percent of its annual GDP. Think about what would happen to your family if you got sick tomorrow and your household income went down by a third. Think about the psychological trauma, and think about the sheer economic cliff that represents.

Houston and Florida are going through something similar, of course. But in the rich parts of those places, there are still the resources to make people whole, to start again. Maybe not entirely—the federal flood insurance program, for instance, is never going to be the same, and that's going to cause the price of real estate to start falling, and so on. But for the moment, Naples will likely recover. The poor parts of Texas and the Sunshine State are more like Puerto Rico, of course—they don't have the buffer.

We're starting to realize how unbuffered the whole planet is. At least Puerto Rico won't be permanently underwater—that's the fate of many island nations, unless we act very fast. But everywhere new vulnerabilities emerge almost daily. You can't do something as enormous as destabilizing the entire planet and expect it not to wreck whole swaths of lives.

It's clear what our job is: It's to do all we can to address that suffering. We've got a military—its job this winter should be making sure that Puerto Rico is as fixed up as it can be, because they're the only ones who can work on that kind of scale.

But our job, also, is to staunch the flow of carbon into the atmosphere. Maria is what happens with 1 degree Celsius of global warming. We're currently on a path for an increase of 3 or 4 degrees Celsius. That would be enough to join the whole planet in a community of collapse. ■

Bill McKibben is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont and founder of 350.org.



We're starting to realize how unbuffered the whole planet is.

images of groups of people standing in fields where the few remaining transponders would catch a signal, desperately trying to phone friends and family. Electricity was suddenly a thing of the past, and in places likely to stay that way for six months or a year. And when you lose electricity—well, there goes AC, not to mention ice. The concept of cold disappears for a while. Modernity retreats.

In a rational world, we would rebuild Puerto Rico with a bunch

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This 13-month wall calendar includes all the major feasts of the Episcopal Church, color-coded to coordinate with the liturgical seasons. Photos of esteemed felines from around the church—along with humorous captions—make this unique calendar a perfect gift.



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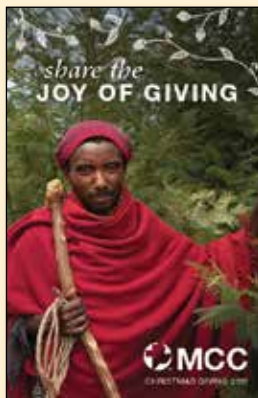


Love the Sinner DVD

Multitude Films \$19.99

lovethesinnerfilm.com

Love the Sinner is an award-winning documentary exploring the relationship between Christianity and homophobia in the wake of the shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando. Start a conversation about LGBTQ dignity and inclusion this Christmas!



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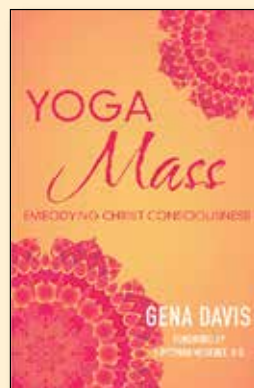


Evolving Understanding: An Ordinary Feminist's Reflections on the Teachings of Christ

Sandra Lund Greenberg
Mountain Cat Media LLC
\$8.99

mountaincatmedia.com
amazon.com

A casual discussion of how the teachings of Christ support an egalitarian view. Exploring diverse subjects from the nature of God, adultery, and even the author's unique views on Jesus' marital status. Join the conversation.



YogaMass: Embodying Christ Consciousness

Gena Davis
Paperback \$19.99, Hardcover \$37.95,
eBook \$3.99

Amazon, Balboa Press

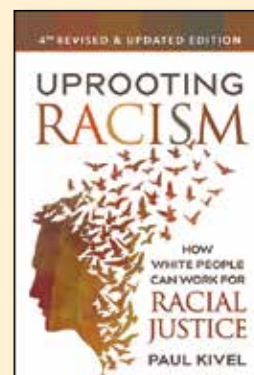
Embracing the mind/body/soul/spirit connection is a path to wholeness and deeper connection to God. YogaMass bridges yogic principles and Christian theology, offering a fresh perspective of Christianity that deepens the experience of being fully human, and inspires spiritual awakening.



Anabaptist Prayer Book

Institute of Mennonite Studies
amb.edu/prayerbook

Let Jesus' words pervade your whole day through these morning and evening prayer services with a distinctive Anabaptist flavor. Features include scripture-saturated prayer, space for communal reflection, and underlying Anabaptist themes. Print options: Advent through Pentecost and Ordinary Time. Downloadable free app.

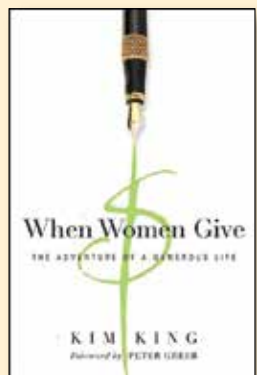


Uprooting Racism

New Society Publishers
U.S./Can \$24.99

newsociety.com

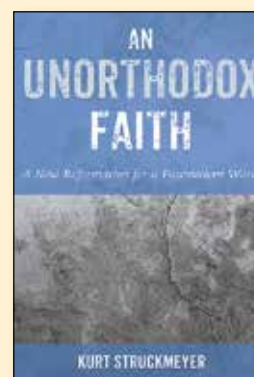
There's a long tradition of white people opposing racism—but there are also many excuses we give for not getting involved. Now in a fully updated 4th edition, *Uprooting Racism* is the supportive, practical go-to guide for helping white people work with others for equal opportunity, democracy, and justice in these divisive and angry times.



Women—Harness Your Opportunity to Give

InterVarsity Press

ivpress.com/when-women-give
Women can change the world through giving! Kim King uses her perspective as both a donor and a board member for several Christian nonprofits to give women practical advice for giving at all levels.

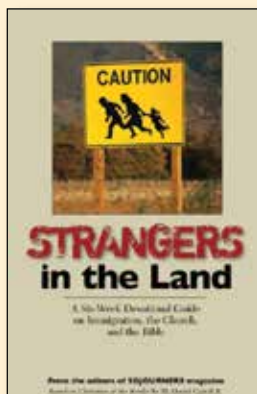


An Unorthodox Faith: A New Reformation for a Postmodern World

Mustard Seed School of Theology
\$25.60 Wipf & Stock paperback
\$9.99 Amazon Kindle

wipfandstock.com

The postmodern reformation of *An Unorthodox Faith* redefines what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Deconstructing traditional orthodox Christian beliefs, this book recaptures the secular religion proclaimed by Jesus that leads to a more just and peaceful world.

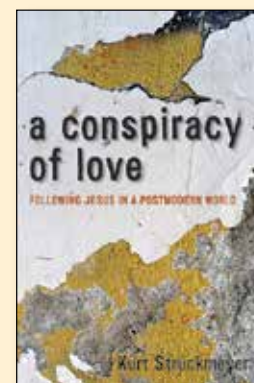


Strangers in the Land devotional (Kindle edition)

Sojourners
\$5.99

sojo.net/sitl

A six-week devotional on immigration by the editors of *Sojourners*. Every Christian is an "undocumented foreigner." How does this inform the church in the battle over U.S. immigration laws? Perfect for personal meditation and small groups, and especially valuable during Advent.

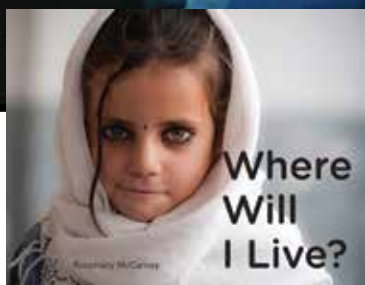


A Conspiracy of Love: Following Jesus in a Postmodern World

Mustard Seed School of Theology
\$24.00 Wipf & Stock paperback
\$9.99 Amazon Kindle

wipfandstock.com

Dietrich Bonhoeffer envisioned a "religionless Christianity," a simple faith of contemplative prayer and righteous action reflecting Jesus' urgent call for a conspiracy of love to transform the world toward justice and peace. This book calls us to that task.



By D.L. Mayfield

Life's Not **Fair**

A book list for confronting the world's disparities.

BOOKS ARE WINDOWS into other worlds and glimpses of experiences not our own. One of the most powerful ways books have worked in my life is to illuminate the truth that the world is a very unequal place. It started at a young age for me, my childish mind consumed with stories such as that of Helen Keller (and her teacher, Anne Sullivan, who for several years lived in a "poorhouse") and missionary biographies of people such as Amy Carmichael and Gladys Aylward, who worked with children who had been trafficked or orphaned in other countries.

Even as a child I puzzled over why some children suffered so greatly and others didn't. It wasn't fair.

As much as I loved stories with fairy-tale endings, such as *The Secret Garden* or *The Little Princess*, I returned constantly to narrative nonfiction that exposed me to a wider, morally complex world. And this drive never left me.

Today, there are many books that address the topic of inequality in fresh, insightful, and provoking ways.

FOR CHILDREN

Where Will I Live? by Rosemary McCarney. Few situations highlight as many forms of inequality as the refugee crisis. The lack of access to safe housing, food, water, and your own



Refugees at the border of Hungary, from *Where Will I Live?*

country are concepts that are both devastating and yet easily understood by even very young readers. This book is full of images of refugee children and the questions they ask about their present lives and immediate futures. An excellent way to introduce children to the reality of many children around the world and to begin the conversations about how they are our neighbors and what it means to love them.

When I Get Older: The Story Behind "Wavin' Flag," by K'naan. A short picture book that gives elementary-aged children a glimpse into what it is like for people to resettle in a Western country (Canada, in this case). Written by Somali-Canadian poet, rapper, singer, songwriter, and former refugee K'naan.

The Story of Ruby Bridges, by Robert Coles, makes explicit connections to both how recent the story of Ruby Bridges is—she

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The Islamic Jesus

was the first African-American child to desegregate an all-white elementary school in New Orleans, in 1960—and how it continues to affect our schools. It will open discussions regarding school inequity, segregation, and the civil rights movement.

VISUALS FOR ALL AGES

What the World Eats, by Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio. As an educator, I love all the books by photojournalists Menzel and D'Aluisio. I regularly use *What the World Eats* in the English language classes I teach in refugee and immigrant commu-

Narrative nonfiction can invite us to consider people very different from ourselves as our neighbors.

nities because it simply and succinctly uses images to capture the beauty of differences between cultures while highlighting disparities—from the bare-bones sustenance of refugee camps to the overflowing budgets and countertops of families in the U.S. Even the types and varieties of food are fascinating to discuss—from families who only eat what they farm to those that buy mostly pre-made and packaged food.

Where Children Sleep, by James Mollison. Photographer Mollison's seemingly simple conceit reverberates with consequences: He traveled all over the world to take pictures of children and where they slept at night. From straw mats to rooms stuffed with toys, the wide variety (and sometimes stark contrasts in security and wealth) of the conditions children find themselves in is hard to turn away from.

A Beautiful Ghetto, by Devin Allen. Allen was born and raised in Baltimore. His photos of his neighborhood—both the mundane and beautiful everyday scenes and what took place after the killing of Freddie Gray at the hands of the Baltimore Police Department—show the culmination of decades of tension and demands for equality. Allen is a perfect

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New & Noteworthy



HEARTLAND HEROES

Best-selling author Miriam Horn of the Environmental Defense Fund brings her timely book *Rancher, Farmer, Fisherman* to life in a new documentary. Narrated by award-winning journalist Tom Brokaw, the film highlights five surprising "conservation heroes" working to protect the land they love. rancherfarmerfisherman.com

A DAILY GIFT

In *Gift and Task: A Year of Daily Readings and Reflections*, renowned Old Testament scholar and theologian Walter Brueggemann provides daily reflection on scripture. Beginning with Advent, Brueggemann invites readers to critically consider the "cost and joy of discipleship." Westminster John Knox Press

CREATIVE COLLABORATION

Featuring the voices of Audrey Assad, Josh Garrels, David Gungor, and Liz Vice, *The Porter's Gate Volume 1: Work Songs* is the live product of a three-day conference held in New York City. With 14 modern hymns, the album celebrates vocation and invites listeners to reimagine worship. portersgateworship.com

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims have fled Myanmar in recent months. In *Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim "Other,"* journalist Francis Wade explains the roots of Rohingya persecution and the silence of former human rights leaders there, including Aung San Suu Kyi. University of Chicago Press

Travels with Dante

THIS SUMMER, in Mississippi, I sat by my father's bed for three weeks and watched him die. After that, I drove one of my kids from Kentucky to New England for a college visit. Along the way, we climbed a mountain and spent the night in a rest area when we couldn't find a motel room. Then, with five-sixths of my family and three weeks' worth of camping gear packed into (and onto) an aging minivan, we drove to Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada. Along the way, in British Columbia, we went through an active wildfire and saw a tree explode into flames about 50 feet from our van. At Banff we saw a moose, two grizzly bears, and the vast acres of gravel left behind by the rapidly receding Columbia Icefield.

On every step of this long, strange trip, I carried with me a big, fat, well-worn paperback book, its margins filled with my youngest son's class notes. So, what did I

I was reading "The Inferno" at my father's bedside as he went through a few nights of hell on his way toward paradise.

do this summer? I read *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri. Every night—well, most nights—I spent 15 or 20 minutes accompanying the poet of the early 1300s down into the depths of Hell, up the winding mountain trails of Purgatory, and on to the beatific vision of Paradise.

At our kids' school, everyone reads *The Divine Comedy* in 11th grade: the whole thing, all year long. And they mostly love it, or learn to. Then, at a parents' meeting this year, my wife, Polly, learned that another mother was reading Dante along with her child and loving it. Soon Polly challenged many of our friends and colleagues to read the entire *Divine Comedy* over the summer. One hundred cantos, each about



Dante, holding *The Divine Comedy*, stands between Florence and his imagined afterlife in this detail from a 1465 painting.

four pages of poetry, plus translator's notes. One canto per day.

For years, I've spent part of my summer reading some super-sized classic novel that I should have read decades ago, but hadn't. This year I had my heart set on David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*. But, hey, a challenge is a challenge ...

And I don't regret it a bit. I was reading "The Inferno" at my father's bedside as he went through a few nights of hell on his way toward paradise. "The Purgatorio" gave metaphorical resonance to the towering Rocky Mountains, and "The Paradiso" gave me a vision of a time worth recapturing, when all the greatest artists and intellectuals saw the Jewish-Christian story as the organizing principle of the universe.

But mostly I was struck with how very modern, or at least unmedieval, Dante was. His pilgrim narrator on this spiritual journey was no generic Everyman. It was Alighieri himself, a fully realized, autobiographical, first-person narrator in the throes of a midlife crisis, yearning for an unrequited love, driven by literary ambition, and outraged at the corruption of church and state in his beloved Italy. In fact, there were passages,

especially those where he talked poetry with his spirit guide Virgil, in which Dante struck me as the true ancestor of Norman Mailer and his *Advertisements for Myself*.

And all the suffering, struggling, or rejoicing souls that the pilgrim meets along the way are not allegorical figures. They are actual people drawn from Dante's own era, often named by name, with their real-life follies and hypocrisies exposed for all to see, for all eternity. And they are enduring very specific punishments or penances that the poet crafted to visualize the consequences of our common moral weaknesses.

About halfway through my Dante project, I remembered the moment in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* when Lucy says to Schroeder, "Everyone talks about how 'great' Beethoven was. ... How can you say someone is great who's never had his picture on bubble gum cards?"

I still don't know much about Beethoven. But now I can tell you: Dante Alighieri was great, even without the bubble gum cards. ■



Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.

Continued from Page 41

example of why we need artists to illuminate their own places—his photos carry the love and attention to detail of a true neighbor. This book gave me chills in how it highlights an inequality that many white Americans are still coming to grips with, and does it in a beautiful, honest way.

NARRATIVE NONFICTION

My favorite genre is narrative nonfiction—especially the kind that evokes empathy and self-reflection to the point of change. In short, stories that transform the way we view our world, invite us to consider people very different from ourselves to be our neighbors, and examine how we might be obligated to show love to them in an unjust and unequal society. Here are a few of my recent favorites, both for their writing style as well as the people they profile.

City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp, by Ben Rawlence.

As someone who works with refugees and immigrants, I appreciated Rawlence's deep dive into the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya to give us an immersive experience in the lives of nine of the inhabitants. Refugee camps exist in their own world—no citizenship, no rights, the basics barely provided. The humanity on display in this book is impressive, even as most of the stories are both deeply sad and implicate the lack of concern worldwide for the plight of millions seeking safety and security in a time of war. To give a faceless “mass” specific names, hopes, fears, and tragedies is to speak to how connected we are to the stateless wanderers of the earth.

Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City, by Matthew Desmond.

Desmond, a sociologist, spent considerable amounts of time in precariously housed communities in Milwaukee, talking to white families in trailer parks and African-American single mothers searching for apartments, as well as predatory landlords. His resulting work shines a light on a crisis that punishes the most vulnerable and remains largely unseen by many Americans. Anyone with a stable roof over their heads will certainly feel discomforted at the knowledge that the stories revealed



From *Patti Cake\$*

BEING PRESENT TO THE PRESENT

A FEW YEARS AGO, Woody Allen made a subtle cinematic joke about writers and artists harking back to “the good old days,” while soaking up—and co-creating—the atmosphere of 1920s Paris. If ever there was a “good old days,” some might think it was 1920s Paris. The joke of *Midnight in Paris* was that even people who live in the good old days are nostalgic for their own version. People feel the same way about movies: “They don’t make them like they used to” is the common refrain.

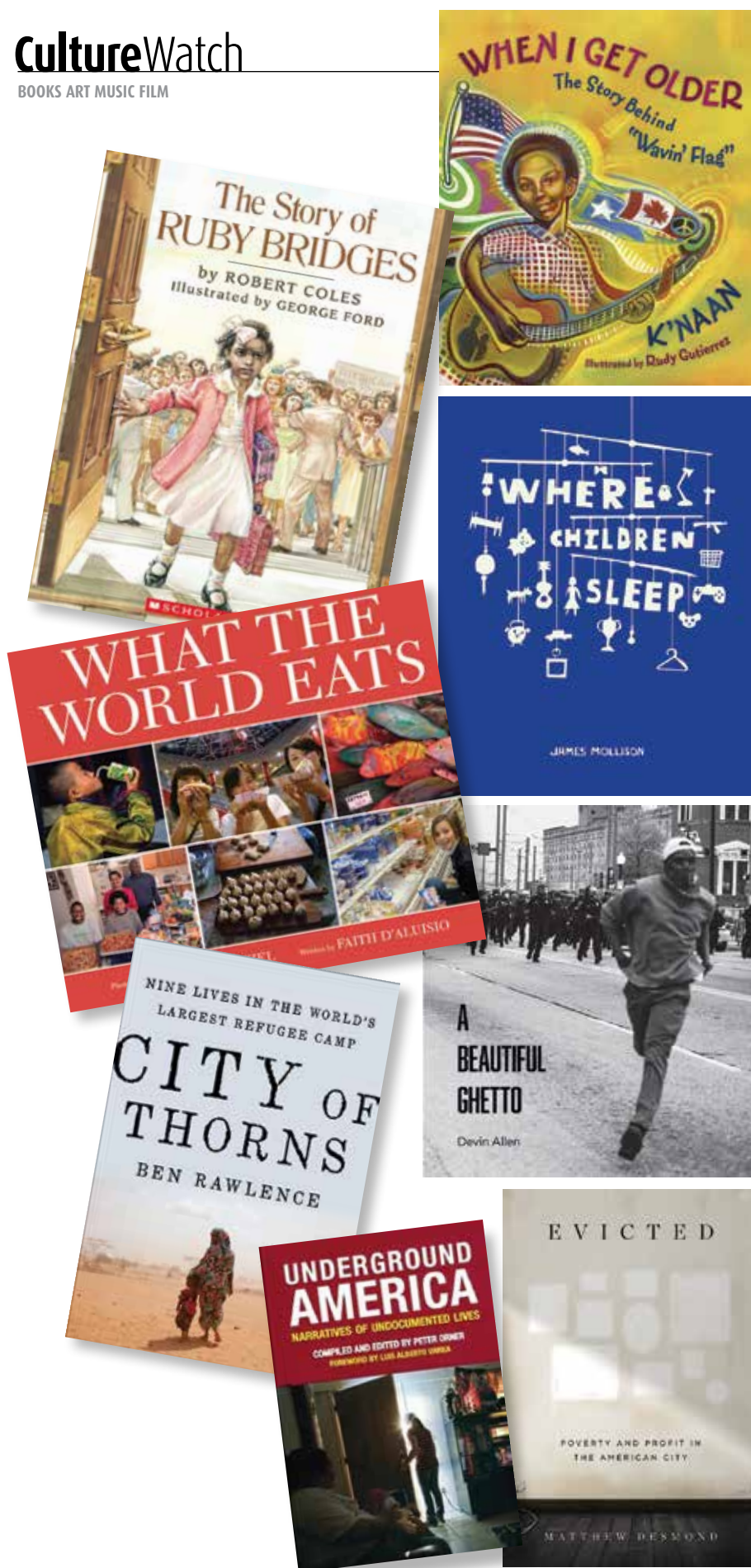
A recent online discussion asserted that movies were better before the millennium, proposing 27(!) reasons why. But a closer look discerns positive, more nuanced news. There definitely seem to be more bad films around, but there are also more good films, partly because simply more films get made. And they *don’t* make them like they used to—contemporary movies are more psychologically nuanced and sociologically diverse than ever. Compare some Academy Award Best Picture nominees and winners of five decades: *The Graduate*, *Annie Hall*, *The Last Emperor*, *Titanic*, *No Country for Old Men*, and *Moonlight*. You can see a transition from white male-centered dramedies or epics of the “exoticized other” to a pro-feminist movie, a serious engagement with the human shadow, and a profoundly humane story about LGBTQ people of color.

It does seem that the most popular

movies today are usually forgettable theme park rides, whereas until about 25 years ago annual box office top 10s usually contained a handful of artful dramas. But movies are not getting worse—in 2017, *Endless Poetry*, *Patti Cake\$*, *Mother!*, *Maudie*, *Beatriz at Dinner*, *The Lost City of Z*, *A Ghost Story*, *War for the Planet of the Apes*, *Okja*, and *The Big Sick* easily stand alongside any 10 of the best films of any previous year. This matters for reasons similar to how we approach contemporary affairs: Believing that everything is worse today is part of the same process that leads people to vote for the past.

Instead of “They don’t make them like they used to,” perhaps it’s truer to say, “It’s me who changed.” Perhaps we remember good old days because they remind us of when wonder came more easily, before we felt the burdens of the world. This may be even truer now, as we grapple with the bombardment of electronic info-noise. When I was much younger, going to the movies was a treat, sometimes a spectacle. Now I can watch an epic on a screen smaller than a deck of cards, and the available choices seem overwhelming. But I also can see more cinematic wonder than ever, and those wonders may be just as wise as the icons of the past. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and www.irelandretreats.com.



in *Evicted* are happening throughout the U.S. As I write this, the housing shelters for families here in Portland, Ore., are full to bursting. Desmond brings home the point that inequality (be it housing or otherwise) doesn't simply just happen—inequality is on the rise because other people profit from it.

Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives. This collection of oral histories, edited by Peter Orner for the Voice of Witness series, is eye-opening for the sheer diversity of stories represented. In public discourse the phrase “undocumented immigrant” conjures up a specific narrative. Here, that idea is shattered, as is the belief that the U.S. immigration system is built upon justice or equity. From *au pairs* to cooks to day laborers, the stories compiled in this volume are incredibly complex and not easily defined—except by the singular truth that to be undocumented in the U.S. is to live a life of suffering and exploitation. To be born in a place and given citizenship automatically is a privilege that many of us never question; this book requires readers to do so.

Learning that the world is unequal is a rite of passage, particularly for U.S. Christians. But scripture is full of stories of the struggle to right wrongs, to bring justice where there has been injustice. From the Magnificat to the poetry of Isaiah to the sermon on the plain in the gospel of Luke, we see that inequality is never far from the mind of God, and that it is a consistent theme pressed onto the people who struggle to love God and their neighbors as themselves.

I hope that we all continue to seek out books that ask the same questions of us, help our children to ask these questions, introduce us to neighbors and neighborhoods that we are unaware of, and compel us to consider our personal responsibility to them. Reading can be a form of contemplative activism—and can bring us closer to a truer definition of righteousness, and equity, in our world. ■

D.L. Mayfield lives in Portland, Ore., with her husband and two small children. She is the author of Assimilate or Go Home: Notes from a Failed Missionary on Rediscovering Faith (HarperOne).



John Wesley preaching

Reviewed by Beth Norcross

WHAT WOULD JOHN WESLEY DO?

Love in a Time of Climate Change: Honoring Creation, Establishing Justice, by Sharon Delgado. Fortress Press.

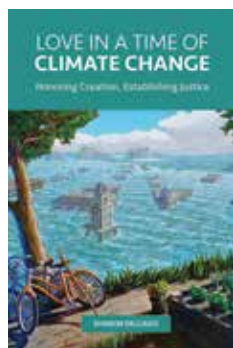
WHILE OPENING a star-studded concert for victims of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, musician Stevie Wonder remarked: “Anyone who believes that there’s no such thing as global warming must be blind.”

These two major hurricanes had just ravaged Texas, Florida, and much of the Caribbean. While scientists are cautious about ascribing causation to any individual storm, they do not hesitate to say that warming waters and altered weather patterns due to climate change will cause many more such destructive events in the future.

As we watched the horrific scenes on our television screens, one thing was clear—the most vulnerable suffer the most.

In *Love in a Time of Climate Change*, Sharon Delgado asks people of faith to rise up in love and compassion for those most under threat and for all creation. In her introduction, she asks: “What does it mean to reach out in compassion to our suffering neighbors when disaster follows disaster with no end in sight?”

To answer this question, she employs John Wesley—the Anglican priest and theologian who inspired the founding of the Methodist Church—and the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral,” which identifies scripture, tradition, reason, and experience as the key elements of theological reflection. In Delgado’s capable hands, Wesleyan theology, developed primarily in the 18th century, offers timely and surprisingly relevant



insights into both honoring creation and establishing climate justice.

In terms of the first element of the quadrilateral, Delgado offers a convincing scriptural case for caring both for the natural world and for neighbor. In particular, she explores Romans 8, in which Paul makes clear that both the human and the nonhuman will be renewed

and redeemed by Christ’s love.

On the topic of reason, the author details the significant impacts of climate change, including mass extinction of species, disruption of food and water supplies, enormous dislocation, and, of course, storm events. She pleads with Christians of all stripes to wake up to the scientific consensus on climate change and speaks candidly about the economic and political forces that are at play: “The underlying ideology that propels climate change is Market Fundamentalism, which professes faith in the market above all else.”

As Delgado explores the role of experience, she expresses a sentiment seldom seen in similar books on faith and ecology—the importance of re-engaging and reconnecting with nature itself, and looking for God there: “[C]reation has value for us because we love it and because through it we experience the divine.” Too often, activists forget that a deep and intimate relationship with nature, and God experienced through nature, forms the foundation for changing our behavior toward the earth.

In exploring tradition, Delgado finds inspiration and hope in Wesley’s views on social holiness and mines liberation theology, always emphasizing compassion as a cornerstone of action: “Compassionate action is what love of God and neighbor requires.”

Given the author’s emphasis on compassion and love, it was surprising when, perhaps in her prophetic zeal, she condemns corporate America, the fossil fuel industry, and the Republican party as though they are monolithic. She also repeatedly criticizes and generalizes what she calls “the Religious Right,” saying that “[t]his conservative religious lobby’s talking points and policy proposals on energy and climate are largely indistinguishable from those of the fossil-fuel industry.”

Readers might wrongly conclude that this statement is also true of the many religious conservatives and evangelicals who are actively engaged in addressing climate change. For example, the Evangelical

Wesleyan theology offers timely and surprisingly relevant insights into climate justice.

Environmental Network condemned President Trump’s withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord as “profoundly foolish” and called on “each and every one of us to take a stand for climate action.” If we are to deal successfully with the complexities of climate change, we will need to work lovingly and side by side with our conservative and evangelical brothers and sisters, who have an essential role to play, particularly in the political arena.

Delgado unapologetically says that “this is no time to mince words.” In this interesting work, she makes a compelling call to all people of faith, particularly Christians, to take seriously the “radical changes that are necessary to meet this challenge” of climate change. ■

Beth Norcross is the founding director of the Center for Spirituality in Nature in Arlington, Va., and is adjunct faculty at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.

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ad-vent (noun)

1. the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event.
2. the season observed in many Christian churches as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus at Christmas.

"One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." —Matthew 4:4

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CultureWatch

BOOKS ART MUSIC FILM

Reviewed by Richard F. Gillum

FAITH AND HOW WE DIE

Modern Death: How Medicine Changed the End of Life, by Haider Warraich.
St. Martin's Press.

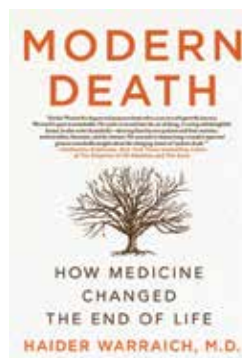
SOUTH ASIAN-AMERICANS, such as Siddhartha Mukherjee and Atul Gawande, have recently made a dent in the white male hegemony that has reigned in medical writing for general audiences. Haider Warraich is following in their path with this new book on death and dying.

With liberal use of anecdotes from a medical residency in Boston, Warraich snaps the reader out of sanitized TV portrayals or even hospital experiences of death to induce a more authentic confrontation, one most would seemingly rather avoid at all costs. (Witness church members who no longer have funerals but "celebrations of life" and "homegoings," often after enduring dehumanizing and futile end-of-life interventions.)

But is lack of knowledge about the mechanics of "modern death" in a technological society at the core of the problem, as Warraich seems to think? Is his thesis correct that our fear of death is greater than ever? Can social media posts by the dying overcome these problems?

After chapters on cell death and trends in longevity, Warraich discusses the institutionalization of death in the 20th century. Over half of Americans now wish for a home death, but 80 percent end up dying in a hospital or nursing home. Most of the poor die in hospital, while the wealthy can choose home or hospice.

Warraich gives a history of CPR and other life support techniques and the evolution in the 1970s of the ethical and legal basis to withhold or withdraw life support, including the slippery concept of "brain death." Perhaps 90 percent of ICU patients with no hope of recovery can survive for weeks or months without a decision to withdraw life support. Hence Warraich's chapters on caregivers and



families of ICU patients are particularly helpful, especially the sections on family conflict and health care proxies, “one of the hardest things one can be nominated to be.”

I wonder what influence Warraich’s upbringing and medical education in a Muslim society (Pakistan) had on his views about death and dying. He mentions incidents or characters from the Hebrew Bible, not the Quran. He notes that “most patients have great spiritual needs and many derive strength from their faith” but that these needs often are unmet in hospital. Indeed, he devotes the seventh chapter, “When Death Transcends,” to this topic, drawing on a range of disciplines to explore the link of death and religion in America. At the end of life, religious belief brings comfort to many, but it is also associated with more-aggressive care as patients and families pray for a miracle. Spiritual care by the medical team may help the religious forego futile interventions. Yet one study found that only 10 percent of hospital physicians included religion in discussions at the end of life.

Surveys find U.S. doctors more likely to be Jewish, Hindu, or Muslim and less likely to rely on God in decision-making than their patients; religious physicians are less likely to advise withdrawal of treatment. Warraich compares the teachings of the major world religions on care at the end of life. Most Muslims see suffering as purification, reject euthanasia, and grant physicians much authority. Warraich himself seems to advocate avoidance of suffering and endorse physician-assisted suicide, terminal sedation (if not euthanasia), and maximum patient autonomy. He concludes that “not talking about a patient’s faith is tantamount to not treating them as a person.”

Although Warraich’s affirmative answers to my opening questions are not convincing, his book is enlightening. It is extensively referenced and indexed, and it would be especially valuable for clergy and for health-care providers in training, as well as for middle-age and older general readers anticipating decisions regarding the end of their own lives or those of loved ones. ■

Richard F. Gillum, a medical doctor, is a professor of medicine and an epidemiology researcher at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

Reviewed by Anne Colamosca

ROOTS AND RELATIONS

The Islamic Jesus: How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims, by Mustafa Akyol. St. Martin’s Press.

AFTER A CHRISTIAN missionary handed Mustafa Akyol a Bible on a busy Istanbul street, the Turkish journalist became fascinated with the many similarities between his Muslim faith, Christianity, and Judaism. As a moderate Muslim, Akyol had been studying the Quran with a group of friends for some time. He used his study group discussions as background to inquire about the other two religions.

The result is *The Islamic Jesus*, which takes the reader on a complex, winding journey, detailing many of the profound historical and religious bonds of the three religions. They “are like three siblings,” explains Fred M. Donner, a respected historian of Islam, in a University of Chicago lecture. He points out that there was quite a bit of fluidity and interchange among these “siblings” in the first few centuries after the Prophet Muhammad died in 632.

Akyol, who writes for the Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet Daily News* and *The New York Times International Edition*, became engrossed early on with the different ways that Jesus is portrayed in the New Testament and the Quran. The New Testament, of course, describes Jesus as divine, part of the Trinity, and the son of God. The Quran is reverential toward Jesus, and he is seen as the last Jewish prophet, but not as divine. The Islamic view is that there is only one God, and no Trinity.

Akyol puts a lot of credence in the views of James D. Tabor, a scholar of Christian origins and ancient Judaism, who writes, “There are two completely separate and distinct Christianities embedded in the New Testament.” The version that has defined Christianity for years is the Pauline version, based on the teachings of Paul, who preached to the Gentiles throughout the Greco-Roman empire. Akyol explains that “the more Christianity moved away from its Jewish roots ... the more it perceived Jesus as divine.” And since the Gentiles already believed in many divine Gods, it seemed natural, when they became

Christians, to pronounce Jesus divine.

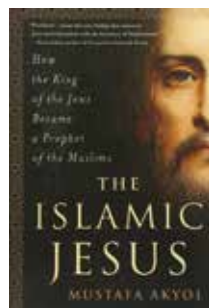
But another group, which fascinates Akyol, were the so-called “Jewish Christians.” They began as followers of James, one of the 12 disciples and the biological brother of Jesus, according to some scholars. James is the author of the very brief Epistle of James in the New Testament. The “Jewish Christians” became marginalized, were declared here-

tics, and scattered throughout the Middle East. They believed, as the Muslims came to believe, that Jesus was a revered prophet. They also followed special Jewish dietary laws and practiced circumcision. Donner points out that there were reportedly Jews and Christians who sometimes shared worship spaces a century or so after

the Prophet Muhammad died. The implication seems to be that there was also some interchange among people who prayed in these spaces, and an open-minded environment as early Islam defined itself. This would begin to change soon thereafter.

While Akyol brings his relentless reporter’s drive to analyze these happenings, it is also very worthwhile to read Oxford scholar Tarif Khalidi’s *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*. Published in 2003 and hailed as a classic, Khalidi’s rich, contemplative work is beautifully written and also describes a much-revered Jesus, this time defined in 300 Arabic stories based on numerous texts, along with the Quran. In these terribly violent times throughout the Middle East, these two books remind us again that Donner’s “siblings” were not always enemies. Far from it. As Akyol generously concludes, “given our grim malaise and [Jesus’] shining wisdom, we need to follow him.” That’s unusual advice from a mainstream journalist working in today’s autocrat-led Turkey. ■

Anne Colamosca is a former staff writer at BusinessWeek and has written for many national magazines and newspapers.



Advent: A New Year

ADVENT MARKS THE BEGINNING of the Christian year, for many. We await the return of Jesus and prepare for it by revisiting the story of his first coming. In Isaiah 64, the prophet longs for God to tear the heavens and come down, a description more apt for the latter return of Jesus than his first appearance. The longing for Jesus to return and fix the world's mess escalated for many last year about this time and was expressed by a widely read online Advent devotional under the hashtag F**kThisS**t. (The original title was unapologetically uncensored. The originators argued that "to convey a visceral gospel, we must sometimes use visceral language.")

There is a theology that says one day God will clean house and fix everything. In the meantime, we have to live here. Advent is about waiting *and* preparation. What shall we do while waiting for the return of Christ? What can we do about the state of the world? The gospel for the second Sunday in Advent calls for spiritual work, confessing and repenting sins (Mark 1:4-5). The following week the gospel suggests that there is work to which we can put our hands: "Make straight the way of the Holy One" (John 1:23).

Preparing for this Christmas season and the eventual return of Christ, we can have no



better guide than Isaiah 61, the text Jesus chose for what is regarded as his first public sermon: "Bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty and God's favor, and comfort all who mourn" (verses 1-3, modified).

Wil Gafney is an associate professor of Hebrew Bible at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas.

[DECEMBER 3]

Stay Woke

Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

"STAY WOKE" IS A MANTRA of the Black Lives Matter movement. (The grammar is AAVE, or African American Vernacular English.) It is an exhortation to pay attention to the injustices around us. In the New Testament, the expression "keep awake" urges believers to watch and wait for Jesus to return (see Matthew 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:35, 37; 1 Thessalonians 5:6).

"Stay woke" and "keep awake" may seem distinct: one a focus on human failings and the other a focus on Jesus who redeems, restores, and reconciles. The two postures hold much in common. In neither is one *only* watching and waiting. Those who assert the value of black life, in the face of actions and policies that deny its value, stay "woke" to resist and counter the squandering of black life and those who defend death-dealing policies. Likewise, the call to "keep awake" is a call to *actively prepare* for the return of Jesus.

That preparation is indicated by the illustration in Mark 13:32-37 in which the slaveholder expects his slaves to do their assigned work while he is away. The text is

concerned with whether the slaveholder will find his slaves sleeping. Staying woke while reading this text—and indeed all the scriptures—means resisting the normalization of slavery in the text, including in the teaching of Jesus.

Unfortunately, unhappily, the slaveholder appears to be analogous to Jesus in the parable. Staying woke to the ugliness of that convergence and its impact on the history of the world means never minimizing slavery in any context.

[DECEMBER 10]

A God of Mercy

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

IT'S YOUR OWN FAULT. One broad tradition in Israelite theology can be summed up in the notion that bad things happen to people who do bad things—or, in some cases, because their parents or ancestors did bad

things (see Deuteronomy 28:20; Ezra 9:13; Jeremiah 11:17). But there came a point when this theology had to be revisited. The horrors the Israelites endured during the siege and fall of Babylon and during the exile were more than they could have ever deserved, even with the most vengeful retributive theology.

God spoke to the poet-prophet, who here continues the Isaian tradition, to rebuke this theology. God tells the prophet to comfort her people (Isaiah 40:1) and assure them that whatever penalty they might have earned has been more than paid—double, in fact (40:2). The Isaian tradition may have been continued in Second and Third Isaiah by disciples that First Isaiah took into the desert (8:6). In *Daughters of Miriam*, I argue that some of those writing in this tradition were women.

To comfort the people, the prophet offers a well-rounded theology to reintroduce them to their God. God overturns the status quo, even if it's carved in stone (Isaiah 40:4); God holds all accountable (verse 10); God tenderly cares for her sheep and lambs (verse 11). Here the most comforting attribute of God is God's presence. This is the "good news"—*basar* in Hebrew is *euangelizo* in Greek, later "gospel." Here is your God (verse 9)!

Whatever will come, God will be with them—in victory, defeat, exile, and restoration.

[DECEMBER 17]

Mary's Poetry

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

MOTHER MARY and son Jesus are both powerful preachers (and cousin John isn't bad either). Isaiah 61 ("The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ...") is memorable because Jesus used it for his "inaugural sermon" in Luke 4:16-22. It is a simple and straightforward declaration of the good news. The poet-prophet responsible for this portion of Isaiah speaks in the first person on behalf of an unidentified person. In Luke 4:21, Jesus claims this text as his mission statement.

Isaiah 61 on its own is a powerful proclamation of the gospel, making plain that the work of God through her servant is the care and redress of the downtrodden and

disposed, including a complete reversal of their fortunes. People at the bottom of every power curve are God's primary concern: the oppressed, the broken-hearted, those experiencing captivity—political and social, such as occupation, and those imprisoned—with no mention of guilt or innocence, and those who mourn (Isaiah 61:1-2). The well-being of these is at the heart of the gospel in both testaments.

In *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Howard Thurman asked rhetorically if there was "something unique ... in the womb of the people out of whose loins [Jesus] came." The affirmative response applies to the *woman* out of whose womb Jesus came as well. Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46b-55) is rooted in Hannah's hymn (1 Samuel 1:1-10) and in Psalm 113:5-9. It is a hymn of trust and praise—and makes a very fine sermon. I'd like to think Jesus knew his mother's poetry and preaching and that it is reflected in his own.

[DECEMBER 24]

House Hunting

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26;
Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

GOD DWELLS WITH US. Second Samuel 7 and Luke 1:26-38 each detail a potential divine home. In 2 Samuel, David comes up with the honorable idea of providing God a permanent home reflecting the glory of David's own home. In an interesting episode, Nathan tells David to go for it, but when he gets home, God is waiting for him like a wife who has just found out her husband made plans for her without checking. She is not pleased. She tells him to march himself back to David and tell him no. David can't build God a house because David's hands are stained with blood from his years of pillage and murder, killing women, men, and likely children as well (1 Samuel 27:11).

The home the Blessed Virgin offers God in Luke 1:26-38 stands in marked distinction from the bloodstained building David would have built. She offers flesh, blood, and a pure heart. Reading this text on Christmas Eve doesn't allow the reader to live with and contemplate this miraculous pregnancy. It really belongs nine months

in advance. Since the date of Christmas has been set as Dec. 25, the Feast of the Annunciation is observed on March 25. The Annunciation has been understood as such a pivotal day—detailing God's intent to dwell in human flesh in and through the body of Miryam (Mary) of Nazareth—that some medieval Christians marked it as the first day of the new year.

[DECEMBER 31]

A Jewish Messiah

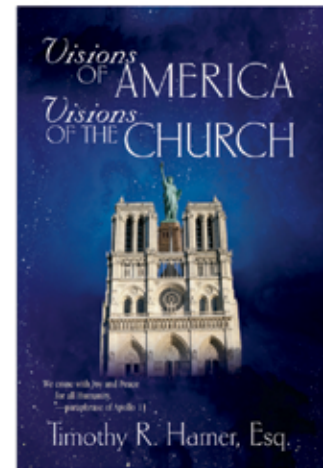
Isaiah 61:10 - 62:3; Psalm 148;
Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40

IT'S STILL CHRISTMAS in churches like mine where Christmas is a season and lasts 12 days. Today's lessons remind us that at the heart of our Christian story is a faithfully Jewish, Torah-observant family. In Luke 2:21, Yeshua (Jesus) is circumcised, according to Leviticus 12:3. In the assigned text Miryam goes to the temple to be purified after childbirth, according to Leviticus 12:1-8. The text presents the purification with the redemption of the firstborn, though there would have been a 10-day period between them. The redemption ritual was based on Exodus 13:2 and Numbers 18:15-16, in which all firstborn are offered to God. Miryam's sacrifice is the offering permitted for women who are too poor to offer the standard lamb (Leviticus 12:6, 8).

The author of Luke takes pains to establish the Jewish identity and fidelity of the holy family. He uses the plural throughout to make Yosef (Joseph) a participant, though the purification was for Miryam alone. The gospel builds a case that Yeshua is the Jewish messiah, confirmed by a venerable elder Shimon (Simeon) in Luke 2:25-32 and by a prophet Hannah (Anna) in Luke 2:36-38.

A messiah or "anointed one" is a priest in the Torah and a monarch in the rest of the Hebrew Bible (see Leviticus 4:3; 2 Samuel 23:1; Isaiah 45:1). Unlike monarchs and priests who are concerned with (only) their people and their borders, this messiah offers light and redemption to *all* nations. ■

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The Nashville Statement

I SPENT THE PAST several weeks worrying about hurricanes—and the maddening way some people keep denying any connection between these storms (aka extreme weather events) and climate change. (I have this mental picture of me throwing these people into a flooded Houston neighborhood and shouting, “Is *that* science enough for you!?”)

Anyway, as a result, I totally missed the release of The Nashville Statement. After some research, I realized that this important document has been insufficiently ridiculed by an award-winning humorist. But since Dave Chappelle won’t return my calls (or answer my emails, or reply to those notes I left on his bedside table when he was sleeping; he looks so peaceful ...), I’m going to give it a shot.

The statement reaffirms conservative evangelicals’ belief that marriage is between a man and a woman (and presumably their lawyer when, you know, it doesn’t work out half the time), despite the fact that no one was confused about their stance, or needed reminding that this particular limb of the body of Christ makes God blush with embarrassment whenever they



Nashville, but it could just as easily have come from Shreveport, La., or Tallahassee, Fla. I also would have accepted The Dallas-Fort Worth Statement, The Tuscaloosa Statement (Roll Tide!), or The From-My-Cold-Dead-Hands Statement.

The Brooklyn Statement, not so much.

The Nashville Statement was written by The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, an organization previously known for its pivotal role in maintaining galactic peace in the *Star Wars* universe. I didn’t realize it had social concerns on earth. Of course, you just *know* its original name was The Council on Biblical Manhood, but then somebody reported that “the gals in the office were feeling left out.”

“And we should get some ladies to sign the statement, too,” someone else probably remarked, belatedly, judging by the small number of women who actually signed the darn thing. (Of the 165 initial signatories, I counted only 16 women, not including Alistair and Ardel, who I wasn’t sure about.)

On the plus side, none of the signatories was Pat Robertson, a gay-shaming originalist whose

selfless toil in the garden of prejudice and hate is always rewarding, but exhausting. Because of global warming, there *always* seems to be another natural disaster to blame on “homosexuals.” It’s hard to keep them all straight.

The statement has a “pre-*amble*” and lots of “*articles*,” no doubt modeled on the U.S. Constitution, a copy of which many Christian voters carry at all times, right next to their concealed-carry permit. Unlike the original Constitution, however,

Ken Davis

not a single slaveholder signed The Nashville Statement. The signers may have undocumented help around the house, people who have to take two buses to work and make only seven bucks an hour, but hey! There’s nothing wrong with that, right?

In essence, the statement simply states—and repeats 14 times, in case you weren’t paying attention—that the LGBTQ community is lesser in the eyes of God and should not be given the freedom to live and love like the good, *normal* people who judge them with such harshness. To be fair, the authors deserve credit for not painting with a broad brush; they make a point of including references to transgender people. But that probably raised questions from their constituency.

“What’s a ‘transgender’?”

“You know, the bathroom people.”

“Oh, right.”

At press time, we couldn’t confirm if God agrees with any of this. I ran into God in an elevator recently, but I couldn’t make eye contact. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

It was a welcome endeavor, because we were confused about how they really felt.

come up in conversation. (I heard that God doesn’t even make eye contact on elevators anymore.)

Nor was anyone surprised that the statement came from the Bible Belt, a region known for churchgoers who think Jesus was simply off-message when he preached the Sermon on the Mount. In their view, Jesus should have stuck with the PowerPoint on personal salvation, not that whole thing about “those” people being blessed.

The statement originated in

From Matthew 25: "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in...? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"
"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these ...you did for me."



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